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CHINA DAILY
FRIDAY, May 26, 2023
中国日報
chinadaily.com.cn RMB ¥2

Xi: BRI helps boost Eurasian collaboration

He tells forum that initiative offers 'path of happiness' that benefits whole world

By CAO DESHENG
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As the Belt and Road Initiative drives an economically vibrant Eurasian region while delivering increasing benefits to the world, President Xi Jinping has urged stronger synergy between the initiative and the Eurasian Economic Union to boost Asia-Europe cooperation.

While addressing the opening ceremony of the plenary session of the second Eurasian Economic Forum of the Eurasian Economic Union via video link late on Wednesday, Xi reiterated that the ultimate goal of the BRI is to "explore new ways for countries from near and far to achieve common development and to open up a path of happiness that benefits the whole world".

The forum was held in offline and online formats in Moscow, Russia, on Wednesday, with the theme "Eurasian Integration in a Multipolar World". The Eurasian Economic Union is an international organization of regional economic integration whose members are Russia, Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan — all of which are partners of China under the BRI framework.

Xi said that in a turbulent and changing world, proceeding with Asia-Europe cooperation concerns not only the well-being of people in the Eurasian region, but also will have a profound impact on global development.

The development of China, a member of the Eurasian family, cannot be achieved without the Eurasian region, which also will benefit from the development, he added.

Xi expressed his hope that the synergy between the BRI and the Eurasian Economic Union will be deepened, and that all countries will work together with unity and dedication to open up new prospects for Asia-Europe cooperation.

This year marks the 10th anniversary of the BRI. China will host the third Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation in the second half of the year.

Xi said that China is ready to work with participating countries, including the members of the Eurasian Economic Union, to continue to hold high the banner of peace, development, cooperation and mutual benefit, share opportunities and overcome difficulties in trying times to have a better future, and join hands to write a new chapter in the progress of civilizations in a multipolar world.

Guided by the principle of wide consultation, joint contribution and shared benefits, the BRI has deepened mutually beneficial cooperation with participating countries, becoming a global public good and international cooperation platform.

Since the initiative was proposed in 2013, over 3,000 cooperation projects have been launched, involving nearly $1 trillion of investment, according to the Foreign Ministry. Many nations have thus realized their dreams of railways, bridges and other infrastructure as well as poverty alleviation.

Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Mao Ning said at a regular news conference on Wednesday that "to date, over three-quarters of countries around the world have joined this initiative, which has generated 420,000 jobs in these countries and helped more and more countries speed up economic growth. All those fruitful outcomes fully indicate that the BRI is a pathway to common development.

"We believe that the advancement of high-quality BRI cooperation will create more opportunities for the common prosperity of countries," Mao added.

Kirill Babaev, director of the Russian Academy of Sciences' Institute of China and Modern Asia, said that the BRI has promoted the development of infrastructure in the Eurasian region, bolstered the construction of transportation and logistics corridors and facilitated trade and investment, enhancing Eurasian economic integration.

Noting that China's economy has enormous potential for further growth and that it actively invests in emerging markets and develops economic projects outside China, Babaev said that given the strong economic complementarity of Russia and China, strengthening bilateral economic and trade cooperation will benefit the peoples of both countries.

Ren Qi in Moscow contributed to this story.

A surgical robot peels a raw egg without damaging the eggshell membrane during a media preview on Wednesday for the Beijing International High-tech Expo, part of the Zhongguancun Forum. The forum opened in Beijing on Thursday and runs through Tuesday. ZHANG WEI / CHINA DAILY

Beijing called on to leverage its sci-tech advantages

By CAO DESHENG and DU JUAN

President Xi Jinping highlighted on Thursday China's opening-up strategy, which brings mutual benefit and win-win results, and said the nation is willing to work with countries around the world to promote technological innovation to better benefit people of all countries.

Xi made the remarks in a congratulatory message to the 2023 Zhongguancun Forum, which opened in Beijing on Thursday and runs through Tuesday.

Xi said that the world is undergoing a new round of technological revolution and industrial transformation, and humanity needs greater international cooperation, openness and sharing than ever before in order to address problems in common development.

He urged the city of Beijing to fully leverage its advantages in education, science and technology, and talent resources, and to make coordinated efforts to promote technological innovation and institutional innovation, accelerate the construction of world-class science and technology parks, and strive to set the pace in the innovation of cutting-edge technology and development of high-tech industry.

Founded in 2007, the Zhongguancun Forum has grown into a national-level open innovation platform and an international forum. This year's forum, with the theme "Open Cooperation for a Shared Future", features more than 150 events, including conferences, exhibitions, a competition in cutting-edge scientific fields and technological cooperation fairs.

The forum will focus on cutting-edge fields such as artificial intelligence, quantum science and brain-computer interfaces, explore trends in technological innovation and showcase the latest achievements and new technologies, according to the organizer of the event.

Yin Lin, head of the international cooperation office of the China Association for Science and Technology's international cooperation department, said in an interview with China Daily that in recent years, a growing number of international science and technology organizations have set up branches in Beijing, and this has enhanced global scientific exchanges.

The forum's exhibitions will display cutting-edge technologies, products, high-end manufacturing and major technological achievements from around 650 companies and institutions.

A total of 55 parallel sessions of the forum will be held starting on Friday. These will focus on artificial intelligence, life sciences, clean energy and other frontier fields.

A record 2,500 teams from 30 countries and regions will participate in the competition in cutting-edge scientific fields.

Participants at the forum come from 80 countries and regions and include representatives of 200 foreign government departments, international organizations and institutions. About 120 top experts, including 17 Nobel Prize laureates, will deliver speeches, with foreign speakers accounting for more than 40 percent of all presentations.

The Zhongguancun Forum aims to become an important international science and technology summit and a platform for new scientific achievements and related policies, said Wu Zhaohui, vice-minister of science and technology, at a news conference on May 15. It will contribute Chinese strength and wisdom to global sciences and technological development, he added.

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YOUNG PEOPLE SPUR RURAL DEVELOPMENT DRIVE

Key role played in improving agriculture and countryside affairs

Editor's note: *As China accelerates the promotion of rural vitalization, more young people are contributing to the development of agriculture and rural affairs, while also benefiting from grassroots work. China Daily interviewed three people born after 1995, who shared their stories of "young power" driving rural development.*

By CHEN MEILING in Beijing and HUANG ZHILING in Chengdu

indepth

Zhang Guifang, 24, was surprised to be elected Party secretary and director of Sanjia village, her hometown in Hebi, Henan province, as she had no experience of doing such work.

However, she soon realized that the villagers wanted someone who could bring vitality to what many of them saw as a rather dull area.

Like many other Chinese villages, most young people left Sanjia to work in big cities, leaving seniors behind to farm and take care of the children. Over the past two years, Zhang, who is determined to bring change to the area, has proved that her ideas work.

See ***Youth****, page 2*

G7 urged to deliver on no-decoupling pledge

By WANG KEJU and MA SI

Any country's attempt to push for decoupling from or cutting supply chains with China will harm its own interests and dampen global economic recovery and growth, officials and experts said on Thursday.

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Their comments came ahead of a scheduled meeting between the commerce chiefs of China and the United States. Shu Jueting, a spokeswoman for the Ministry of Commerce, said at a news conference on Thursday that Commerce Minister Wang Wentao will hold talks with US Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo and US Trade Representative Katherine Tai at the 2023 APEC Ministers Responsible for Trade Meeting. The meeting is being held in Detroit, Michigan, in the US on Thursday and Friday.

The two sides will discuss China-US economic and trade relations and issues of mutual concern, Shu said. She called on the US and other members of the Group of Seven to deliver on their commitment to not decouple from China, which they made in a joint statement released at the just-concluded G7 Summit.

The nations said in the statement on Saturday: "We are not decoupling or turning inwards. At the same time, we recognize that economic resilience requires de-risking and diversifying."

But Japan, a member of the G7, rolled out measures on Tuesday to restrict exports of 23 types of semiconductor manufacturing equipment to China. Shu said China firmly opposes the move, which she called an abuse of export control measures and in breach of free trade and international rules.

Such misconduct will seriously damage the interests of enterprises in China and Japan, sabotage economic and trade cooperation between the two countries and impair secure global semiconductor industrial and supply chains, the spokeswoman added.

See ***Commerce****, page 3*

Candid communication

Iranian students who are learning the Chinese language talk on Wednesday with Chinese diplomats at Allameh Tabataba'i University in Teheran, Iran. Before the event, Chinese Ambassador to Iran Chang Hua and Abdollah Motamedi, president of the university, signed a memorandum of understanding on the establishment of a China Pavilion at the university library. It will offer students Chinese books and cultural products. SHADATI / XINHUA

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国内统一编号: CN11-0091 国际标准编号: ISSN0253-9543 邮发代号:1-3

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Vol.43 — No. 13425
ANN ASIA NEWS NETWORK *A member of the Asia News Network*

VISIT…

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PAGE TWO

Youth: Hard work helps transform villages

From page 1

When local officials persuaded her to stand for election, Zhang thought that being a village head would be a relaxing experience, as she could earn a good living without doing much work, but this has been far from the case.

The village, which occupies 4.42 square kilometers, has 400 permanent residents, 80 percent of whom are 60 or older.

It had no main industry, and Zhang saw broken trees, desolate roads and dilapidated homes. In the two months after she was elected the village Party secretary, she cried every day due to stress.

She thought about giving up, but one day, Zhang heard her father talking about her to a friend on the phone.

"He was so proud of me. I had never seen my father react like this before, as he always seemed taciturn and serious. This rekindled my faith that I should bring hope to the village," she said.

When she was 10, Zhang left Sanjia to attend school, returning home during weekends, when she stayed mainly indoors. As a result, she did not know many locals.

"At first, I felt shy and uneasy about getting along with the villagers. I began learning to greet them on the street, and with help from the former village head and other colleagues more experienced than myself, I gradually became more familiar with the work," she said.

After gaining inspiration from social media, she came up with the idea of painting walls in Sanjia to create a "rainbow village" to develop tourism. She showed pictures to this effect at the villagers' representative conference, but some of them asked whether her idea was a waste of money. "However, they soon found themselves benefiting from the program," Zhang said.

After about a month of renovation work, the village was totally transformed. Its new look drew media reports, heralding the arrival of tourists and business opportunities.

Last year, the village cooperated with a company to plant pumpkins on 26.6 hectares of land, most of which used to be barren. This project produced 30 jobs for villagers, who received 180,000 yuan ($26,019) as a land transfer fee.

In July 2021, a huge rainstorm hit Henan, and the situation in Sanjia was particularly serious. Floodwaters came up to residents' knees, well water was polluted, and electricity cut off. Zhang and her colleagues helped collect relief materials worth 3.84 million yuan from the local government and a charity organization.

After these efforts, Zhang was accepted and recognized as a capable and responsible leader.

She has since helped roads and tap water pipelines to be built in Sanjia, and has opened the village's first library, projector room, basketball court and public toilet. She was surprised that the villagers were willing to play their part in such work.

The village is now working on a new millet-planting project, which is expected to produce more jobs.

Before taking the job as village Party chief, Zhang ran a bed-and-breakfast business in Tianjin. Ma Yousheng, a local Party member, said that in late 2020, the village authorities appealed for several people of Zhang's age to return for the election, but only Zhang did so.

He added that the authorities in Shilin town, which administers Sanjia, wanted young people to help bring changes to the village.

Ma, who is a friend of Zhang's father, said that when Zhang was a child, she had the enthusiasm "for doing things" and learning about agriculture at college.

Zhang, who graduated from Tianjin Agricultural University with a major in plant protection, said: "My father told me that what I could learn from being a village Party secretary could not be compared with any other job. I then realized that no matter where you are and what you do, there are opportunities for you to contribute to society."

"When they (local beekeepers) heard their honey was selling well, they all smiled, which was extremely touching. ... I wanted to share my experience to help promote sales of agricultural produce and attract publicity for the county."

Liu Yuanjie, 26, who helps beekeepers in Yuli county, Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region, sell honey through his livestreaming sessions

At first, I felt shy and uneasy about getting along with the villagers. I began learning to greet them on the street, and with help from the former village head and other colleagues more experienced than myself, I gradually became more familiar with the work."

Zhang Guifang, 24, Party secretary and director of Sanjia village, her hometown in Hebi, Henan province

"As the altitude, climate, sunlight and soil in some parts of the village are similar to conditions in Qiaojia (county, Yunnan province), the trees will survive."

Jinie Ziri, 28, Party chief of his home village, Abuluoha, Sichuan province, who promotes local tourism and introduced rice plantain trees from Qiaojia county, Yunnan province, to help local famers earn more

PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Beekeeping duties

With bees swarming on his neck, arms and feet, Liu Yuanjie enthusiastically promoted honey during a livestreaming session at an apiary in Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region.

Being stung has become routine for Liu. At first, his face was swollen for five or six days. Now, he said it only takes him about 10 minutes to recover from a sting, as he has developed antibodies.

With his round face, dark skin, moustache and large, square-framed eyeglasses, Liu's rugged appearance did not seem to match the rural scenery, and some netizens even asked whether the background used for the broadcast was fake.

In footage that has received 97 million views, Liu threw a bucket into a river to prove the waterway was genuine, before rushing to retrieve the bucket as it started to float away. His actions, which amused many netizens, attracted comments such as, "He made me laugh just by standing there."

Liu, 26, attracted 16 million fans in just a year through live broadcasts, thanks to his sense of humor, enthusiasm for work, and the beautiful scenery in Xinjiang. He brings in monthly revenue of 3 million yuan, with a profit margin of 20 percent, by selling honey and related products bought from local farmers.

His story has inspired many people lacking good looks or a rich family background that nothing is impossible in life.

Born in Jiangsu province, Liu dropped out of school when he was 16. He started work by polishing and painting cabinets at a furniture factory, before being employed as an electric welder at a shipyard. Later, he learned software development and started his own e-commerce clothing business, which failed.

In 2020, Liu traveled to Xinjiang, where he was impressed by the local livestock and stunning scenery. "Xinjiang is so big and beautiful. It healed me. I knew I would be happy if I stayed here," he said.

During a trip to Yuli county, Bayingolin Mongol autonomous prefecture, Xinjiang, Liu tasted local honey, and was impressed. Yuli is known for bluish dogbane, a popular herb, whose flower is a major source of honey. Its long florescence in June and July offers beekeepers natural advantages.

However, most beekeepers sold honey through Wechat Moments, and sales were poor. Liu wanted to bring the product to a wider market through using digital tools.

"Xinjiang has long hours of sunlight, and temperatures vary widely from day to night. Many different types of flower grow in the wild, resulting in honey being produced in considerable quantities," he said.

Liu spoke to local beekeepers, but nobody was interested in his suggestion, until he proved himself with growing sales. He also paid beekeepers in advance. "When they heard their honey was selling well, they all smiled, which was extremely touching," he said.

Honey from Yuli is now sold nationwide, and orders for it have also been placed by foreign clients. The unit price is 100 yuan per kilogram, and Liu promises clients they can receive packages of honey within five to seven days.

Last year, he helped sell honey and black wolfberry from Yuli, attracting orders worth more than 10 million yuan. His business expanded, and the goal this year is to make 100 million yuan, he said.

To use the stunning local scenery, Liu and his team members drove across Xinjiang, sometimes sleeping in the open air. Zeng Rui, one of Liu's partners, told Beijing News of the time they broadcast a livestreaming show near Bosten Lake. She woke up at midnight, as she was so cold, and made a fire. Sometimes, the team stayed in the desert for a week.

Liu's success led to him being elected president of the Yuli Beekeeping Association. He helped 40 beekeepers' families sell honey and invited agricultural experts to train them.

In January, as a member of the Yuli County Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, he suggested that more measures be introduced to encourage young people to become entrepreneurs.

As vice-president of the Bayingolin Self-media Association, Liu trained hundreds of people interested in livestreaming.

"I wanted to share my experience to help promote sales of agricultural produce and attract publicity for the county," he said, adding that he wants to help build up the industry to bring wealth to more people.

Twelve of his 14 team members are from Yuli. Arman Ablimit, 20, who is responsible for after-sales and client services, told cnr.cn that she learned from Liu how to persevere, and that she wants to stay in her hometown after graduating to help it develop further.

Tourism promotion

On April 6, Jinie Ziri stood out among people celebrating the 100th day of operation of the new Chengdu-Kunming Railway, which runs between Sichuan and Yunnan provinces. The tall young man, dressed in an ethnic Yi costume, spoke fluent Mandarin to promote tourism in his home village of Abuluoha, Sichuan.

Located deep in a valley of the Jinsha River on the upper stretches of the Yangtze River, the village boasts mountains on three sides and cliffs on the other, providing a wealth of natural scenery.

Those who know Jinie Ziri, 28, said he is always ready to promote his village, situated in Butuo county, Liangshan Yi autonomous prefecture, Sichuan, which is home to the largest number of Yi people in China. The village used to be extremely poor.

Abuluoha, which translates as "valley surrounded by rolling mountains" in the language of the Yi ethnic group, is the latest village in China to be connected to the outside world via a new road, which was constructed in 2020.

In the 1960s, leprosy was prevalent in Liangshan. More than 300 patients with the disease in the prefecture were accommodated in one area of Abuluoha, which was commonly known as the "leprosy village".

Covering more than 6 sq km, the village is home to 65 families and a population of 253. Until recently, 29 local families and 182 people were poverty-stricken, with corn and peas their only crops.

When Jinie Ziri reached school age, the village had no primary school. He spent 10 hours each day walking to and from a school in Jinyang county in the prefecture.

Graduating from Sichuan Radio and Television University in Chengdu, capital of Sichuan, he worked for a charity company in Xichang, Liangshan, for two years, earning 4,000 yuan a month.

Quitting his job to return to his home village, he became its youngest Party chief in 2017.

He only earned 1,600 yuan a month as the Party chief, but felt honored to help fellow villagers beat poverty. He introduced 3,000 rice plantain trees from Qiaojia county, Yunnan, and the villagers received a subsidy of 5 yuan for planting each tree.

Laibao Bazei, a 47-year-old resident, thought the trees would not survive, as they had never been grown in the village before.

But Jinie Ziri said, "As the altitude, climate, sunlight and soil in some parts of the village are similar to conditions in Qiaojia, the trees will survive."

Three years later, the village had a bumper rice plantain harvest, and many local residents escaped poverty by selling plantains, including Laibao Bazei, who carried a large bag of them from his fields to Jinie Ziri's home in appreciation.

Jinie Ziri led villagers in planting other crops, such as mangoes, seedless and green peppers, improved varieties of the root vegetable konjac, navel oranges, and a herb with a starchy, tuber-like edible stem that grows underground.

The village boasts numerous wildflowers, and bee farming has become a source of income for locals, who used to carry honey to the nearby town to sell it.

Because the town was a long way from Abuluoha, they had to stay in the town overnight, and sometimes their income from selling the honey did not cover food and lodging costs.

Jinie Ziri used his knowledge of e-commerce to promote the honey among his friends, and also mailed it to those who made orders for the product.

Villagers now sell honey from home, and the local enthusiasm for beekeeping is unprecedentedly high. The price of a kilogram of honey has risen from 60 yuan to 200 yuan, and some villagers earn 20,000 yuan a year from beekeeping alone.

Thanks to the new road, villagers now transport crops to the outside world. Their average annual income has surpassed 5,000 yuan, compared with less than 200 yuan before 2006.

Qiesha Secong, 33, a villager who sold his family's only pony to buy a motorcycle, said, "We now have more confidence in embracing a promising future."

The pony used to carry home seeds, fertilizer, salt and rice along a mountain path, but he parted with it, as the motorcycle does the job much faster.

Shi Baoyin in Zhengzhou and Mao Weihua in Urumqi contributed to this story.

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TOP NEWS

Taiwan people unhappy with DPP, polls show

Residents want peace, development and stability, experts from both sides say

By ZHANG YI
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Taiwan people's dream of better livelihoods and their aspiration to communicate with the Chinese mainland after three years of COVID-19 will prominently figure during the region's leadership election in 2024, experts from both sides of the Taiwan Strait said.

The ruling Democratic Progressive Party's war rhetoric with emphasis on confronting the mainland is gradually running out of steam, as people's dissatisfaction over the DPP's seven-year governance is increasing, they said.

A recent survey conducted by the NGO Foundation for the People has revealed that Taiwan's residents are disillusioned with local Taiwan leader Tsai Ing-wen's performance and the DPP administration's reluctance to address important issues such as the income gap, affordable housing and unemployment.

The opinion poll, which coincided with the seventh anniversary of Tsai taking office in May 2016, showed that 73.9 percent of respondents are unhappy with the administration's approach toward narrowing the income gap.

According to pro-reunification political parties in Taiwan, the DPP's poor performance has triggered economic hardships and livelihood challenges in the region, and has worsened cross-Strait relations.

The high cost of living, coupled with low wages and long working hours, has caused significant hardships, the parties said in a statement earlier this month. There are doubts, dissatisfaction and anxiety in the island society over the DPP's collusion with the United States to fuel conflicts, the statement said.

With Taiwan's leadership election scheduled in January, the pro-reunification parties have called on opposition candidates to reject the "Taiwan independence" agenda and resonate with public opinion to protect Taiwan from conflicts.

According to another poll conducted on May 15 by the Taiwan Public Opinion Foundation, more than 50 percent of respondents do not want the DPP to remain in power.

The 2024 election campaign has heated up in Taiwan, with the island's three major parties recently announcing their candidates.

Kuomintang, Taiwan's largest opposition party, announced New Taipei Mayor Hou You-yi as its candidate on May 17. After being nominated, Hou highlighted in his speech the incumbent administration's lack of vision to facilitate a bright future for young people in Taiwan and emphasized the need for change. He rejected "Taiwan independence" and sought support for a shift in political power.

Former Taipei mayor Ko Wen-je, who leads Taiwan's third-largest political party, the Taiwan People's Party, threw his hat into the ring on the same day.

The two announcements came after Taiwan's pro-independence ruling DPP nominated the island's deputy head Lai Ching-te in April as its candidate for the election. Lai once said that Taiwan is "an independent and sovereign nation", a claim that contradicts historical facts. His remark was strongly condemned by compatriots across the Strait.

According to a recent poll conducted by island media TVBS, Hou of the KMT is the front-runner with the support of 30 percent prospective voters, while Lai of the DPP is trailing with 27 percent. While 23 percent of prospective voters support Ko, the remaining 20 percent are undecided.

Wang Zaixi, vice-president of the National Society of Taiwan Studies in Beijing, said the majority of Taiwan people want peace, development and stability. The DPP's collusion with the US and its pursuit of "independence" while obstructing cross-Strait exchanges have led to growing dissatisfaction among the region's residents, he said.

"Taiwan people are waking up, and the DPP's approach of confrontation with the mainland and creating tension is losing its appeal," Wang added.

Wu Jung-yuan, chairman of Taiwan's Labor Party, slammed the DPP authorities for spending "exorbitant amounts of money" on purchasing weapons from the US and for attempting to send young people to battle.

The DPP has not just wasted Taiwan people's hard-earned money but has also tried to push the region to the brink of war, he said.

Chi Chia-lin, who heads the Reunification Alliance Party in Taiwan, said as the election campaign progresses in the coming months, the DPP's poor performance over the past few years will be further exposed and criticized.

Any candidate who attacks cross-Strait exchanges is expected to lose the support of voters, as the common wish of Taiwan people is deeper interactions and bonds with the mainland, especially after the pandemic, Chi added.

So long, Vietnam

People's Liberation Army navy trainees wave goodbye as they leave Da Nang, Vietnam, for Thailand aboard naval training ship *Qi Jiguang* on Thursday. The ship arrived in Vietnam on a two-day goodwill tour on Tuesday, marking its first visit to the nation after it was commissioned.
ZHENG TIANCHI / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

Authorities warn public against AI fraud

By YANG ZEKUN
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Public security departments in multiple cities have recently urged people to be more vigilant after several cases of AI fraud, in which artificial intelligence tools were used to mimic people's voices and appearances, were exposed.

In a case recently revealed by the public security bureau of Baotou, Inner Mongolia autonomous region, the victim was tricked into initiating a total transfer of 4.3 million yuan ($612,000) via a company account after having a video chat with someone masquerading as his friend.

With the cooperation of the bank, police were able to halt a transfer of 3.37 million yuan, but said they are still trying to recover 931,600 yuan that had already been sent.

On April 20, a man surnamed Guo, a legal representative of a technology company in Fuzhou, Fujian province, received a video call via WeChat from a scammer. Using AI to masquerade as a friend of Guo's, the scammer asked him for help.

Guo's "friend" said he was bidding on a project in another city and wanted to use Guo's company's account to submit a bid of 4.3 million yuan. He promised to pay Guo immediately.

The scammer then sent a bank account number to Guo and after that provided a screenshot of the bank transfer voucher to prove that he had transferred the money to Guo's company's account.

Guo then transferred 4.3 million yuan to the provided account in two separate payments.

When Guo called his real friend for verification after completing the transfers, his friend denied that he had made a video call to Guo or had asked him to transfer any money.

"He chatted with me via video call, and I also confirmed his face and voice in the video. That's why we let our guard down," Guo added.

The case created a buzz on social media platforms and shocked netizens, who said that people who are trusting and lack awareness, such as children and seniors, are especially vulnerable to such a high-tech scam. They called on the government to strengthen the management of related technologies and crack down on crimes.

On May 24, the Internet Society of China also issued a statement about the AI face-swapping scam. It said that as "deepfake" technology — which is often used to mimic the voices and appearances of others in videos and audio recordings — becomes more freely available, related products and services have gradually increased.

It is becoming increasingly common for some people to use AI for criminal purposes, including fraud and slander, and people need to be vigilant and strengthen their awareness to keep themselves from becoming victims of scams, the statement said.

People should be more aware of personal information protection and not be so quick to provide images of their faces, fingerprints and other biometric data to strangers. They should not disclose details of their identity cards, bank cards, verification codes and other similar information, it said.

It reminded people to carefully manage their social media accounts, especially when logging in on unfamiliar devices, to prevent private information from being stolen.

In the times of AI, texts, voices, images and videos are all likely to be deeply synthesized. In cases such as Guo's, it is necessary to verify information by additional means such as by calling the person involved in the transfer, rather than just directly transferring money after communicating by text or other means without verification, no matter who the other party is, it said.

In November, the Cyberspace Administration of China, the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology and the Ministry of Public Security jointly issued the provisions for the administration of in-depth synthesis of internet information services, making clear constraints on the generation, replacement and manipulation of human faces, as well as on the synthesizing and mimicking of human voices.

Some platforms and enterprises have launched initiatives to ban the use of generative AI technology to create and publish infringing content, including but not limited to portrait rights and intellectual property rights.

Zhou Linna, a professor at the School of Cyberspace Security of Beijing University of Posts and Telecommunications, said "AI face-swapping" is becoming a more common tool online fraud and may fuel distrust and more fear in society.

"AI technology is a new thing and can be very convenient, but it could also affect our lives in negative ways," Zhou said. "It is necessary to improve and create laws and regulations to properly use and govern such technology."

Time for a new watch

A visitor tries out a smartwatch at an event introducing new Huawei products in Tokyo on Wednesday. The Chinese tech giant launched a new lineup of wearables in Japan as it looks to strengthen its presence in the market. YUE CHENXING / XINHUA

Ministry rejects hacking claims of Western agencies

By MO JINGXI
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Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Mao Ning on Thursday dismissed as false hacking allegations made against China by Western intelligence agencies and Microsoft, saying it was "a collective disinformation campaign of the Five Eyes initiated by the United States for its geopolitical agenda".

In a blog post published on Wednesday, Microsoft claimed it had uncovered stealthy and targeted malicious activity aimed at critical infrastructure organizations — from telecommunications to transportation hubs — in the US, and the attack had been carried out by a State-sponsored Chinese hacking group called Volt Typhoon.

"We noted this extremely unprofessional report, a patchwork with a broken chain of evidence," Mao said at a regular news briefing in Beijing.

The spokeswoman said China has also noted that US intelligence agencies, including the National Security Agency, and their counterparts from Canada, the United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand, members of the Five Eyes Alliance, have jointly issued a similar report.

"It is widely known that the Five Eyes is the world's biggest intelligence association and the NSA the world's biggest hacking group. It is ironic that the Five Eyes jointly released a report filled with disinformation," she said.

Mao said the involvement of a certain company in the reports indicates that aside from government agencies, the US is using additional channels to spread disinformation.

"This is not the first time — and certainly not the last time — for them to do so. Whatever their subterfuge, it will not change the fact that the US is the champion of hacking," she said.

Investigation reports released by Chinese institutions in September last year accused the US of using 41 specialized cyber weapons to launch more than 1,000 attacks on China's Northwestern Polytechnical University and stealing core technical data. The US has not yet offered an explanation on the matter.

Mao said that Washington should immediately explain its own cyber attacks instead of diverting public attention with false information.

Commerce: China seeks cooperation, not confrontation

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The G7 countries should not talk about not decoupling from China while abusing trade and investment restrictions to suppress the country's development, Shu said, adding that any move to push forward "de-Sinicization" in the name of "de-risking" will only hinder cooperation and opportunity.

China has always played a responsible role in injecting certainty into a world full of turmoil and new growth drivers into the global economy. The country aims to foster cooperation and offer opportunities to the world, not confrontation and risk, she said.

Zhang Wei, vice-president of the Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation, said the technology competition among major countries has long existed, while the trend of globalization and the industrial division of labor are inexorable.

"Unilateral moves by any country could hardly change the economic interdependence of all countries. Forced decoupling and severing supply chains, which could have serious consequences, should be rejected," Zhang said.

Shu, the spokeswoman, also noted that China's network security review over products made by US memory chipmaker Micron Technology is in line with laws and regulations and is a necessary measure to safeguard its national security.

As the world's largest chip market, the Chinese mainland consumes more than half the world's semiconductors, which are then assembled into tech products to be reexported or sold in the domestic market, said research company Daxue Consulting.

"Access to this massive (Chinese) market is essential for the success of any globally competitive chip firm today and in the future," the Semiconductor Industry Association, a Washington-based group that represents the US chip sector, said in a report.

Shu said that the Chinese government remains committed to high-quality opening-up and fostering a more enabling business climate, and it is willing to share the nation's development opportunities with the rest of the world.

Enterprises from all countries, as well as their products and services of all types, are welcome to enter the Chinese market as long as they abide by Chinese laws and regulations, she added.

On Monday, Commerce Minister Wang met in Shanghai with representatives of US companies, including Johnson & Johnson, 3M, Dow, Merck and Honeywell, according to the ministry. Wang said during the meeting that "China will continue to welcome US-funded companies to develop in China and achieve win-win results".

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CHINA

Military to strengthen management processes

By JIANG CHENGLONG
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China's Central Military Commission has tasked more than 30 divisions, brigades and regiments from various branches with piloting a campaign to fully promote the standardized classification in management of the armed forces, according to People's Liberation Army Daily.

Starting this year, all services and armed police forces will focus on the new situations and problems ahead, sum up the practical experience of military management, and improve the specialization and refinement of management, a PLA Daily report said this week.

The campaign will center on combat readiness, aiming to provide support for forming strategic capabilities on schedule, it said, noting that solving new problems in military management must be in accordance with the rule of law.

This is an important measure to implement the CMC's guideline on comprehensively and strictly strengthening military management, and to comprehensively beef up military governance and continuously promote innovation in military management, the PLA Daily coverage pointed out.

The guideline was issued by the CMC in 2019 and was designed to speed up the building of a "new military management system" and promote a "fundamental change" in managing the armed forces.

The guideline stressed the need to focus military management on battle preparedness, improve the wartime military management system and innovate military management in key areas, according to Xinhua News Agency.

Song Zhongping, a military affairs commentator, said that management is crucial for any organization, especially the military, and management ability means organizational and combat capabilities.

The expert was quoted by Beijing Youth Daily as saying that military management mainly focuses on personnel and equipment, such as the transfer and coordination of troops, the deployment and maintenance of equipment, and the combination and use of personnel and equipment.

Improving management capability of the forces is an important guarantee for winning battles, he said, adding that the PLA has attached great attention to joint systematic combat capability.

"To achieve standardized classification in management, the core lies in improving efficiency, increasing coordination among all services and arms, and all theater commands, and consolidating the forces' quick response capability and joint operation capability," said Song.

In addition, the PLA Daily report stated the main task of the campaign, which lies in three parts — military management "during wartime or under dynamic and dispersed conditions", the management in "information network environment", and the management in "new-domain forces with new combat capabilities".

In Song's eyes, those indicated three key points of the task. First, it focuses on how to enhance the rapid response capability among multiple services by optimizing the management mechanism during wartime or when soldiers are not at their bases, he said.

Second, the military should utilize new technologies, such as artificial intelligence, to improve modern management and ensure the safety and reliability of key information.

Third, the PLA will strengthen the management and maintenance of new military technologies and equipment in new fields, such as the use of unmanned aerial vehicles and anti-drone capability.

Hangzhou hairdresser is a deft cut above the rest

HANGZHOU — Within the unassuming confines of what appears to be an ordinary salon, a note affixed to a mirror can easily capture one's attention.

Wang Xiaozhen (left) and her husband give haircuts to blind customers. XU YU / XINHUA

"Hello! I cannot hear. May I kindly request you to indicate your desired hairstyle by either using this pen or presenting a picture? Thank you," reads the note. Upon entering the room, most customers instinctively gravitate toward a vacant seat, forgoing verbal exchanges with the proprietor.

Wang Xiaozhen, the owner of the salon in Hangzhou, Zhejiang province, possesses exceptional talent despite being born with a hearing impairment. Her remarkable skills have been indisputably validated by the prestigious gold medal she won during a hairdressing competition held in France earlier this year.

The 43-year-old Wang achieved this momentous feat at the 10th International Abilympics, a globally renowned competition celebrating the remarkable abilities of individuals with disabilities.

Talking about her motivation behind taking part in the event, Wang said, "I would like to set an example for my daughter."

Wang was born into an ordinary rural family in Hangzhou's Chun'an county and experienced a joyous childhood. After graduating from a local special needs school, she determinedly set out to secure employment and become self-reliant.

At the age of 17, Wang embarked on her professional journey as an apprentice in a hairdressing salon. Reflecting on her early years, she conveyed her determination through a typed message on her phone to Xinhua News Agency, stating, "Due to my hearing impairment, I had to exert greater efforts than others to succeed."

Wang describes herself as "hardworking and optimistic". During those formative years, she not only honed her craft, but fate also bestowed upon her a serendipitous encounter. In 2003, she crossed paths with Dong Hualiang, a fellow apprentice with hearing impairment. Little did they know that this meeting would mark the beginning of a profound connection, ultimately leading to their union as husband and wife.

After getting married, the couple opened a salon in Tangxi township, which is Dong's hometown, and named it Huazhen, combining their names.

Despite earning a modest annual income ranging from 30,000 to 40,000 yuan ($4,300 to $5,700), the couple has found true fulfillment in their chosen profession.

They dedicate their spare time to providing complimentary haircuts for seniors, individuals with disabilities and hardworking cleaners. The couple also extends their goodwill to the blind goalball players of the national team when the athletes are in Tangxi for training.

"I have always been lucky over the past 26 years since I became a hairdresser," said Wang. "I was helped by many people, and I would like to pass on the love to others in need."

In 2020, the salon was relocated, settling into its current location in Hangzhou. Despite the change in place, the hairdresser couple has made sure to keep their prices affordable.

As the media clamors for interviews, Wang said she experiences a conflicting emotion alongside the joy and recognition that came with her gold medal victory in France.

Speaking about her future plans, Wang said she envisions visiting special needs schools, where she plans to impart her life experiences to students who, like herself, navigate the world with hearing impairment.

XINHUA

Mountain herd

Villager Yue Fenglong prepares to herd Nanjiang yellow goats on nearby mountains in Weigan village, Nanjiang county, Sichuan province, on Wednesday. Local enterprises donated Nanjiang yellow goats for villagers to raise. Authorities have also developed a honeysuckle planting industry to vitalize the once impoverished area. SHEN BOHAN / XINHUA

Child sex offenders to be strictly punished

Authorities reiterate 'zero tolerance' approach in era of new technology

By CAO YIN
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Chinese judicial authorities have pledged to maintain zero tolerance for sex crimes against children, revealing that those making use of the internet to rape or molest juveniles will face harsher punishment.

The Supreme People's Court, China's top court, and the Supreme People's Procuratorate, the country's top procuratorate, jointly issued a judicial interpretation on Thursday, specifying a number of situations in which people who sexually harm children could be heavily penalized.

The interpretation, which will take effect on June 1, clarifies that people who force or lure minors to have nude chats online, or ask them to send naked photos or videos, will be convicted of child molestation or indecency.

It also states that those who molest children, causing them injuries or self-harm, or make videos of the molestation to threaten victims, will be given tougher punishment.

The interpretation has made the clarification, "because we've found some criminals cheat juveniles online and sexually assault them in person, or even spread their naked or assaulted videos or pictures through the internet", He Li, chief judge of the top court's No 1 Criminal Adjudication Tribunal, told a news conference on Thursday.

She said that the combination of online and offline offenses has seriously harmed children's physical and mental health, and needs to be harshly punished.

> "The interpretation will contribute to helping solve similar new problems in this internet era, with stronger protection for children."
> **He Li,** chief judge of the No 1 Criminal Adjudication Tribunal of the Supreme People's Court

On Tuesday, three male rapists were executed by courts in the provinces of Hubei, Shandong and Henan, after their death sentences were approved by the top court.

All the convicts were found to have tricked victims via QQ, an instant messaging app, and then used the girls, most from primary and middle schools, as targets for molestation or rape.

In the case of Shandong, for instance, Wang Xiaoshan was discovered to have raped five girls, including three under the age of 14, molested 14 others and assembled a crowd to engage in promiscuous activities, from late 2017 to January 2019.

Wang first lured and asked the girls to send him naked photos and videos through QQ, and then told them that he would disclose the pictures if they refused to go out with him. Finally, he took the victims to hotels and raped them.

"The interpretation will contribute to helping solve similar new problems in this internet era, with stronger protection for children," He added.

Considering some sex crimes against juveniles in recent years were committed by those responsible for child care, such as parents and teachers, the interpretation stipulates that multiple rapes of minors by this group of people will be identified as a "serious situation" of rape under the Criminal Law, meaning that the maximum punishment could be the death penalty.

On Thursday, the SPC and SPP also issued a guideline together with the Ministry of Public Security to streamline procedures of dealing with sexual assault cases involving juveniles.

The guideline, which will also come into effect on June 1, requires individuals and departments to take measures as quickly as possible if they find children suspected of being sexually assaulted or receive reports to that extent, whether or not it is their duty to do so.

The move is to further implement a mandatory system that orders people close to minors to report anyone suspected of doing harm to children to public security organs, according to Na Yanfang, head of the SPP's ninth procuratorial office.

She revealed that a total of 5,358 cases involving harm to children have been detected and handled since the system was set up in 2020, adding that most reports focused on sexual assault.

Briefly

Tibetan medical book added to UNESCO list

Five versions of the *Four Treatises*, an ancient medical book on traditional Tibetan medicine, have been inscribed on the UNESCO Memory of the World Register at a recent meeting held in Paris, the Hospital of Tibetan Medicine of Southwest China's Tibet autonomous region announced on Thursday. Compiled from the 8th to the 12th centuries, the *Four Treatises* is the most fundamental classic of traditional Tibetan medicine and has played an essential role in the dissemination and development of traditional Tibetan medicine. Five versions of the ancient book were inscribed on the list, including four xylograph versions and one gold-ink manuscript version.

Ancient tombs found in Northeast China

A cluster of ancient tombs dating back to the Eastern Han Dynasty (25-220) has been discovered in Linghai city in Northeast China's Liaoning province, according to archaeologists. The excavation was launched by the Liaoning provincial institute of cultural relics and archaeology in March. Su Junqiang, a researcher with the institute, said that the eight tombs are of brick-chamber structure. Over a hundred pieces of burial objects, including pots, urns, plates and models of cooking stoves and wells have been unearthed. In one of the tombs archaeologists found a coffin with a human skeleton inside, Su said. The structure of the tombs and their burial objects are distinctive features of artifacts from the Eastern Han Dynasty, Su added. These new discoveries and some previous archaeological findings suggest that the area of today's Linghai was under the effective jurisdiction of the Eastern Han Dynasty, which had its capital in the central plains of China, Su said. A kiln site dating back to the Liao and Jin dynasties (907-1234) was also excavated.

Shanxi freight train sets off to Central Asia

A freight train carrying auto parts and manufacturing machinery left the city of Houma in North China's Shanxi province on Wednesday, en route to Central Asia. The train will complete a journey of approximately 8,000 kilometers, leaving China via the Horgos Port in the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region, passing through Central Asian countries such as Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, and finally reaching its destination nearly 15 days after its departure. The train is loaded with 1,669 metric tons of cargo consisting of automobile windscreens, hydraulic hoses and building materials, among other goods. Since 2017, Shanxi has launched 10 China-Europe freight train routes and handled 683 China-Europe and China-Central Asia trains, linking 33 cities from 13 countries along the Belt and Road.

XINHUA

What they say

Editor's Note: *The State Council Information Office invited representatives of policing awards recipients to meet journalists and answer questions on the issues of serving the people with loyalty on Thursday.*

We give prominence to the innovation and application of public security technology, and constantly strengthen the construction of intelligent policing by relying on big data to respond to the new requirements and expectations of the public. The number of criminal cases has declined for nine consecutive years in the jurisdiction, and the people's sense of security has always been at the forefront of the city.

Han Jianghai, *head of the Lianqian police station of the Siming Branch of Xiamen Public Security Bureau, Fujian province*

It is our sacred duty to investigate cases and fight crime. In the past three years, my comrades and I have solved more than 3,000 telecom and online fraud cases, and prevented losses of more than 200 million yuan ($28.2 million). In 2023, the number of telecom network fraud cases in Shanghai declined for the fourth consecutive year, which reflects the hard work and dedication of the city's public security police.

Yang Wenqing, *captain of the ninth team of the Criminal Investigation Detachment of Pudong Branch of the Shanghai Public Security Bureau*

Doudian Public Security Checkpoint is the largest checkpoint in the southwest of the capital. It is responsible for public security investigations in the southwest of the capital. We have actively carried out regional police cooperation, increased information sharing, made full use of new technologies and adopted more effective measures to respond to people's expectations and improve traffic efficiency.

Zhang Ku, *former head of Beijing's Doudian public security checkpoint of the Beijing-Hong Kong-Macao Expressway*

I have worked in the explosive-disposal area since I became a police officer 25 years ago and handled about 700 cases related to explosives. Every time I face explosives, I have only one chance to dispose of them. It is impossible not to be nervous when facing these explosives. But what is behind the fortitude and courage of a police officer is the belief that the public's security is supreme. I would like to say to the young officers that as an explosive-disposal officer, from the moment you put on the suit, you should put people first in your heart.

He Liyuan, *deputy head of the public security administration detachment, of Kunming Public Security Bureau, Yunnan province.*

I have been working in this detachment for 24 years, my colleagues and I have turned this national road, with heavy traffic flow, complicated road conditions and prone to road traffic accidents, into a safe and smooth section, resulting in no major traffic accidents and no major traffic jams during the past 24 years. What we traffic police do is to connect with the people, and constantly improve the people's sense of gain, happiness and security. It is our main duty to resolve problems at the grassroots level and at the source.

Huang Yuanbo, *captain of the Wushengguan detachment of Guangshui Public Security Bureau's traffic police brigade, Hubei province.*

YANG ZEKUN

CHINA

Cross-border classes

Elementary school students from Laos join counterparts from a school in Xishuangbanna in Yunnan province on Wednesday. After arriving in China via the China-Laos Railway, some 100 Laotian children embarked on a 16-day trip to various Chinese cities to exchange with Chinese pupils through dancing, singing, martial arts and musical instruments. LI JIAXIAN / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

New metro line connects Suzhou with Shanghai

By **CANG WEI** in Nanjing
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Suzhou's new metro Line 11, which will connect downtown Suzhou with Shanghai, will soon be put into operation.

With a total length of 41.25 kilometers, Line 11 runs between Weiting Station at Suzhou Industrial Park and Huaqiao Station in the Suzhou-administered county-level city of Kunshan.

With 28 stations, travelers can transfer to Subway Line 3 at Weiting Station and to Shanghai's Subway Line 11 at Huaqiao Station, according to the Suzhou government.

The trip from Weiting Station to Huaqiao Station will take about 53 minutes with the train's designed speed reaching 100 km/h.

The long-awaited subway line started construction in 2018 and has been in no-load trial runs since March.

It is now "running the chart", which refers to the train simulating the operation of the whole subway line before officially being put into use.

According to Suzhou Rail Transit Group, which is responsible for the construction of the subway, Line 11 has been running normally according to the operation timetable, with 5,607 trains running a mileage of more than 215,700 km since March.

Before it officially starts operation as scheduled, Line 11 still needs to pass various operation safety assessments. More than 10,000 local residents will also be invited to take a test ride to collect public opinion before the line is put into use, according to Suzhou Rail Transit Group.

"People in Suzhou will soon be able to take the subway from downtown to Disneyland in Shanghai," said Ge Yulei, who works for the rail transit group. "People from Shanghai can enjoy Kunqu Opera, visit ancient water towns and enjoy the local cuisine in Suzhou more conveniently."

In the Yangtze River Delta, one of China's most prosperous regions, many projects are under construction to boost regional integration.

Last year, three interprovincial railway projects in the delta began construction and more than 130 km of high-speed rail has been newly constructed, according to the Jiangsu Transport Bureau.

It said that five interprovincial expressways opened to traffic last year, while about 510 km of expressways finished construction and 12 new interprovincial bus lines were put into use.

Operator: No plan for female-only subway cars

By **ZHOU WENTING** in Shanghai
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The Shanghai metro operator said on Wednesday that in light of the large number of passengers using the city's subway network, it is currently not considering having a compartment exclusively for women on each train.

Residents who wrote letters advocating for women's compartments said it is common for Shanghai subways to be crowded, especially during the rush hour, and sexual molestations have happened.

They also suggested lanes designated for female travelers at railway stations and airports to increase women's sense of security.

Shanghai Shentong, the city's metro operator, said that the addition of women's compartments may put pressure on transportation capacity and have a negative impact on operational safety. It suggested women be alert to stalkers when taking public transportation.

"In case of any incident, they are encouraged to face the suspects and scream for help. The metro staff will offer assistance immediately," the metro operator said.

Shenzhen in Guangdong province designated a compartment on each metro train to be prioritized for female passengers in 2017. But actually the number of men in these compartments is no different from other compartments, said some local residents.

In April, Wuhan, Hubei province, designated a waiting area for women only on the platform of the city's subway Line 2. The Wuhan Women's Federation said that such a practice showed the city's effort to safeguard women's rights and interests and is a step for social progress.

"It showed that the subway operator is trying to better protect women and it may work as a deterrent to lawbreakers," said Liu Jingjing, a 31-year-old resident in Wuhan who regularly commutes on the subway.

The Shanghai metro operator said that it has zero tolerance of sexual harassment and will make patrols more frequent and step up punishment in coordination with police.

In October 2019, a man who touched the breasts of two females, including a minor, in subway cars in Shanghai was given a prison sentence, a move that was hailed nationwide.

It was the first time that a prison term had been handed down in Shanghai for a case of molestation on public transportation. Lawyers said such decisions will serve as a good example for courts elsewhere in the country and deter molesters in public venues.

Born in Qomolangma's shadow, climber ascends to dreams

LHASA — Having successfully conquered Qomolangma, known as Mount Everest in the West, five times in his life, Dechen Ngodrup, 36, was spotted once again at the mountaineering base camp during this year's summit push, assuming a different role as he provided necessary assistance to his teammates.

Transitioning from a mere climber to a seasoned expeditionist, his destiny has become inseparably entwined with the mountain itself.

Last year on May 4, he along with 12 teammates reached the summit of the world's highest peak on the China-Nepal border. Different from previous expeditions, he took on the role of a leader, bearing the weighty responsibility of not only ensuring the well-being and safety of his team but also spearheading groundbreaking scientific research endeavors that had never been undertaken before.

On their way to the summit, the 13-member squad led by Dechen Ngodrup set up an automated meteorological monitoring station at an altitude of 8,830 meters, the highest of its kind in the world.

The station weighing about 50 kilograms needed to be split up into seven parts before being transported and installed by the team.

On the day of their climb to the summit, the team encountered knee-deep snow above 8,300 meters, making every step a laborious feat that demanded an immense amount of energy. What would typically be a four or five-hour trek took them nearly nine hours to accomplish.

After the successful establishment of the station, they continued to ascend to the summit, where they measured the thickness of the ice and snow using high-accuracy radar for the first time at the summit.

Standing on top of the world, Dechen Ngodrup looked toward his hometown Tashizom, the township closest to Qomolangma. Stretching between Tashizom and the county school lies a mountain exceeding 5,000 meters in elevation, which he traversed daily on foot. "Maybe that's where my climbing legs come from," he said with a chuckle.

After completing junior high school, he gained admission to the Tibet Lhasa Himalaya Mountaineering Guide School, thanks to his exceptional physical fitness and impressive academic performance.

In 2008, Dechen Ngodrup was one of the Chinese mountaineers chosen to carry the Olympic flame to the summit of Qomolangma, marking an unprecedented milestone in human history.

Dechen Ngodrup (left) sets up an automated meteorological monitoring station on Qomolangma in May last year. SONAM DORJE / XINHUA

In that same year, the China University of Geosciences (Wuhan) recruited high-level mountaineers. Taking advantage of the opportunity, Dechen Ngodrup enrolled in the university and diligently pursued his studies, earning both his bachelor's and master's degrees.

During his time as a university student, he scaled the highest peaks on all seven continents and hiked to the North and South Poles. It is an achievement known in outdoor circles as "7+2".

As an expedition member and doctoral candidate, he has a new goal of combining his exceptional mountaineering skills with the needs of high-altitude scientific research. "I will always embrace the new and the unknown," he said.

XINHUA

GBA promising prospect for overseas Chinese

China's opening-up will create more business opportunities, meeting told

By **ZHENG CAIXIONG**
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Many investment and business opportunities have been created as Guangdong province goes all out to promote the construction of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area. As a result, a large number of overseas Chinese living and working around the world have returned to their hometowns to take advantage of investment and entrepreneurship opportunities.

Narongsak Putthapornmongkol, president of the Thai-Chinese Chamber of Commerce, said at the 2023 Overseas Chinese Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area Conference that China has continued to open its door wider and wider to the outside world, sharing huge markets and development opportunities with countries and regions around the world.

The Belt and Road Initiative has benefited the world and created unlimited business opportunities for overseas Chinese, he added.

"The planning and construction of the GBA are exciting, and it is believed it will provide a big platform and development space for new generations of overseas Chinese," Putthapornmongkol told the media when he returned to Jiangmen, a Pearl River Delta city, to attend the conference from May 16 to 18.

The overseas Chinese leader, a native of Chenghai, Guangdong province, said the GBA has a market-oriented, legalized and internationalized first-class business environment, which is highly attractive to overseas Chinese business representatives.

He said he would organize more Thai entrepreneurs and representatives of Chinese business people to visit the GBA, encouraging and allowing them to better understand the GBA and expand their career and personal development space in the GBA after he returns to Thailand.

Chau Chak Wing, chair of the Asia-Pacific Region of the World Leadership Alliance — Club de Madrid President's Circle, said construction and development of the GBA are constantly changing and thriving, providing plenty of investment opportunities for overseas Chinese.

"The GBA has broad prospects and will provide stronger impetus for economic recovery in the Asia Pacific region and even the world," he said.

Huang Kunming, Party chief of Guangdong province, said Guangdong has a large number of overseas Chinese, which is a unique advantage of the province, as generations of overseas Chinese have always been concerned about their motherland and the development of their hometowns.

"Overseas Chinese can fully leverage their advantages in funding, technology, talent and familiarity with the international market to help promote the GBA's high-quality development," Huang said at the conference.

"The provincial government will continue to attach great importance to overseas Chinese affairs work, strengthen connections with the vast number of overseas Chinese and create better conditions and services for overseas Chinese to return to their hometowns."

Taiwan Strait not deep enough to deter love

By **HU MEIDONG** in Fuzhou
and **ZHANG YI** in Beijing

After five years of dating and overcoming various challenges including managing a long-distance relationship, a woman from Taiwan and a man from the Chinese mainland finally tied the knot last weekend.

Chiu Yu-chen, from Taiwan, and her husband Li Jian from the mainland celebrated their love by participating in a traditional Chinese-style group wedding in Pingtan, Fujian province with more than 20 couples in cross-Strait marriages on May 20.

As "520" is a homophone of "I love you" in Chinese, every year many couples choose that day to marry.

The couples, dressed in traditional wedding clothes, walked down a red carpet and performed traditional wedding rituals practiced in Fujian and Taiwan such as crossing lit flames, stepping on tiles, and exchanging tea and vows.

They also drank tea made from tea leaves from Taiwan using the water of the Minjiang River of Fujian, symbolizing the exchange and integration of the two sides.

The event took place at a scenic spot in Pingtan, the closest part of the mainland to Taiwan.

Chiu met Li in his hometown in Fujian in 2018, where they bonded over their mutual love of tea. Later they traveled around the mainland and fell in love.

Like many cross-Strait relationships, they encountered the challenges of distance during the COVID-19 pandemic as travel across the Strait was difficult.

"The pandemic came abruptly. Until last year, we were not able to be together, but we supported each other through it all," Chiu said. "It actually strengthened our bond and love for each other."

In March last year, Chiu introduced her boyfriend to her parents, who had mixed feelings about their relationship, but ultimately came to support and understand their love. In November, they registered on the mainland.

"I believe the shallow Strait will never become an obstacle to our love," she said.

Another couple participating in the ceremony, Yan Weijie, from Anhui province, and his wife Hsieh Jui-ling, from Taipei in Taiwan, who both hold doctoral degrees, met in 2014 in an academic program in Shanghai.

They later reconnected when Hsieh visited Yan in Fuzhou of Fujian in 2018. In the following year, they traveled across the Strait for dates.

"We overcame all the difficulties of a long-distance relationship and cross-Strait marriage, and made a lot of contributions to cross-Strait air tickets," Hsieh joked.

Despite the complicated procedure, the couple registered on the mainland and settled down in Fuzhou. "Thanks to the wonderful fate, we crossed the shallow Strait. Although the future is unknown, with him around, every day is a sunny day," she said.

As the nearest mainland province to Taiwan, Fujian has registered nearly 120,000 cross-Strait marriages, accounting for about one-third of the total on the mainland, according to official data.

As more cross-Strait couples make their homes in Fujian, the province has held group weddings and exchange activities for them in recent years.

Ouyang Xiaobo, deputy head of the Fujian provincial civil affairs department, said: "These cross-Strait families tie people from both sides with affection and love, and they are a beautiful testimony of cross-Strait integration and development.

"I hope these new couples will become disseminators for cross-Strait kinship and promote more people-to-people exchanges."

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BRI 10 YEARS ON

Deep-rooted link dates back to ancient time

By EDITH MUTETHYA
in Nairobi, Kenya

From porcelains at the Lamu Museums in Lamu Island and a family tracing their ancestry to Chinese sailors in the historical 13th century Siyu village in Pate Island, it's evident that China and Kenya have a deep-rooted ancestral trade relationship dating back to the Maritime Silk Road.

The Maritime Silk Road stretched from China's east coast to East Africa along the northern shore of the Indian Ocean. The road is currently a key component of the Belt and Road Initiative launched in 2013.

Mansur Ile, a resident of Siyu village, not only follows the history of trade ties closely through oral traditions but has also preserved a collection of porcelain fragments in his house.

"I collected these fragments washed up on the shores six years ago. People have approached me to buy them but I will never sell them. I will preserve them because they are part of our history," the 52-year-old said.

He said the Chinese ship that capsized was among 100 merchant ships that docked near Shanga on Pate Island. Currently, Shanga is an archaeology site, which includes the ruins of foundations of some 130 houses and 300 tombs.

According to legends backed by a DNA test of Baraka Badi Shee's family, 20 shipwreck survivors, sailors from Zheng He's fleet, in Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), swam ashore the Pate Island to Siyu village and married local Swahili women.

Ile said, apart from the prominently featured Badi Shee's family, whose grandmother, Safina was married to the descendants of one of the Chinese sailors, there are others but they have kept their profile low.

Following the DNA confirmation of the ancestry, two of Badi Shee's children, Mwamaka Sharifu and Mohammed Sharifu, got sponsorship to pursue medicine and engineering courses, respectively, in China.

Mwamaka pursued clinical Chinese medicine and graduated from Nanjing University of Traditional Chinese Medicine in 2012.

She then pursued doctoral studies in obstetrics and gynecology at Tongji Medical College of Huazhong University of Science and Technology and graduated in 2018. She is currently practicing in Nairobi.

Ile is one of the beneficiaries of Mwamaka's medical expertise. In 2020, he suffered a mild stroke and Mwamaka treated him using traditional Chinese medicine. He is now doing well.

Mwamaka focuses on neurological diseases specifically, stroke and partial paralysis, because their conventional treatment cost is beyond the reach of most of the villagers.

"I have treated at least 10 critically sick patients from Siyu who have recovered or are in the process of recovery," she said.

"I treat the villagers as a volunteer but patients have to buy the medication, which I import from China."

Mwamaka expressed gratitude to the Chinese government, noting that if it were not for the scholarship, she would probably be battling poverty back in the village.

While in China, she got an opportunity to visit Taicang city in Jiangsu province, her alleged ancestral home, where she was warmly welcomed.

Mohammed Mwenje, the curator at the Lamu Museums and World Heritage Site, said following the DNA confirmation of Badi Shee's family's Chinese ancestry as well as discovery of porcelain of Ming Dynasty, there has been a lot of interest in Lamu and Siyu specifically, not just from tourists but scholars as well.

"Many scholars are interested in the kind of interactions the visitors had and the historical records of the Chinese sailor who led that mission. They are also looking for products, personality and cultural concepts that might have been adopted," he said.

In 2010, the national museums of China and Kenya initiated a three-year program to look for the sunken ship but it was not concluded due to the high costs.

"The junk is sitting on an area with high currents so it requires a lot of planning and high-tech equipment for unearthing it," Mwenje said.

> "This will help in bringing out accurate and reliable information, telling the story of the Chinese-East Africa connection and how it has affected the lives of the people of the two sides."
>
> **Mohammed Mwenje,** a curator at the Lamu Museums

He said the unearthing of the sunken ship would be of interest not only to Kenya and China but also to visitors from across the globe.

He said space has been reserved in Lamu Museums to display Chinese elements but it requires a lot of interpretation work and artifacts.

"This will help in bringing out accurate and reliable information, telling the story of the Chinese-East Africa connection and how it has affected the lives of the people of the two sides," he said.

Chinese products found their way to East Africa in the 17th century, when the region traded heavily with India.

Cultural phenomenon

"Preference for porcelain became a cultural phenomenon. It was highly valued and was passed from one generation to another," Mwenje said.

He said Chinese porcelain was an important household item mostly for internal decoration and decoration of tombs. It was an item of prestige especially for the wealthy families. They represented the wealth and social status of the owner.

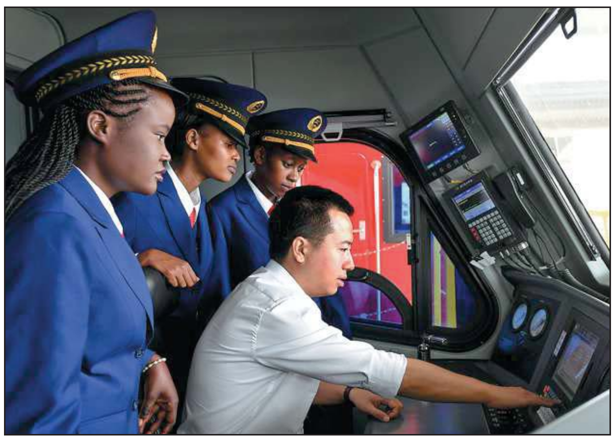
Unlike porcelain from other parts of the world, he said Chinese porcelain was of high quality, due to its manufacturing process, with glazing having been fused together with earthenware.

He said Chinese porcelain has become an item for archaeologists because they can trace when it was manufactured or the factory it came from.

Mwenje noted that many products started coming directly from China in the 20th century, consequently becoming common household items.

Watch the video by scanning the code

Mansur Ile, a resident of Siyu, sorts out porcelain fragments he has collected on the shore near the village. XIE SONGXIN / CHINA DAILY



Kenyan train drivers learn operating procedures from their Chinese instructor during training in Nairobi on May 17, 2017, before the start of the Mombasa-Nairobi standard gauge railway. SUN RUIBO / XINHUA

Editor's note: *This year marks the 10th anniversary of the launch of the Be... and prosperous way for China and the world to share opportunities and seek... how the road of peace, prosperity, openness, green development, innovati...*

KENYA RE... BRI DIV...

By EDITH MUTETHYA
in Nairobi, Kenya
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The Belt and Road Initiative has transformed Kenya's infrastructure development, injected vitality into its economic growth and improved the country's regional competitiveness, according to latest analysis.

Thanks to the initiative, which is celebrating 10 years since its establishment, Kenya boasts modern infrastructure like railways, roads, ports, airports and digital connectivity, experts said.

Cavince Adhere, a scholar of international relations with a focus on China-Africa relations, said BRI projects in the transportation, communication and financial sectors have contributed to making Kenya a more formidable economic hub in the East African region.

He said the Standard Gauge Railway, which connects the capital Nairobi with Mombasa, the largest port city in Kenya, has provided a major link for many traders.

Mombasa port serves 80 percent of regional trade and is the gateway and exit point for cargo for a vast hinterland covering Rwanda, Uganda, South Sudan, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Tanzania, Ethiopia and Somalia.

Lamu port is similarly growing as a transshipment hub as it leverages cargo destined for other African countries — offloaded at the port and taken up by ships that are doing the final leg, Adhere said.

He said the expansion of Jomo Kenyatta International Airport has also helped Kenya better serve its regional and global airline partners, further bolstering its position as a regional transportation hub.

"The BRI has really contributed to Kenya's regional competitiveness and it has opened up opportunities for trade, economic partnerships and financial inclusion."

Adhere said Nairobi, being a regional financial center with Chinese financial institutions in partnership with their Kenyan counterparts, can also benefit the entire region.

Nationally, he said demand for the SGR, one of BRI's flagship projects, has increased significantly, with many cargo companies opting to use the railway because it is predictable, reliable and faster to move goods from Mombasa to Nairobi, especially for hinterland companies.

The Africa Star Railway Operations Company, the operator of the SGR, added both first-class and economy passenger coaches from April 19 to May 9 to cater to the increasing demand during the closing and opening of schools.

Gerishon Ikiara, a lecturer at the University of Nairobi's School of Diplomacy and International Studies, said that were it not for China, Kenya would not have had the SGR.

Ikiara, who was the permanent secretary when Kenya signed an agreement with the Chinese government for the construction of the railway, said they had struggled to get a financier for the project.

He said most of the lenders were very expensive and set out stringent terms. China, on the other hand, was flexible in negotiations.

"The railway has provident efficient transportation along the northern corridor and has reduced travel time for both passengers and cargo," Ikiara said.

For many years, the government was also looking for an investor to construct an expressway under a public-private partnership model, he said.

Major feature

"Today, the expressway is a major feature in Nairobi city and has benefited both the rich and the poor through reduced travel time and by reducing congestion in various streets of the city," Ikiara said.

According to the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, the SGR transported 2.39 million people in 2022, doubling year-on-year.

Kenya is among the countries with the highest internet penetration rate, thanks to investments in partnership with Huawei, a multinational Chinese ICT provider, which have helped the country modernize its telecommunication capabilities, Cavince Adhere said.

"Young people now have opportunities to work online. Additionally, Huawei is helping many governors to modernize ICT and telecommunication in counties," he said.

Last year, Huawei signed an agreement with the Kenyan government to roll out 43,000 kilometers of communication cables across the country to bridge the digital connectivity divide.

In the financial field, Adhere said the payment system under the instant-messaging app WeChat,

African countr... modern infrastru... regional com...

A Chinese tourist poses for a... performer at Jomo Kenyatta... Nairobi on Feb 11. HAN XU / XI...

From left: A section of the Nairobi Expressway in Nairobi; the Liwatoni Floating Bridge that was built by China Road and Bridge Corporation has... Nairobi standard gauge railway on May 30, 2017. With projects including railways and bridges, the Belt and Road Initiative is adding ever greater conne...

Molecular laboratory injects momentum in boosti...

By OTIATO OPALI in Nairobi, Kenya

By the time the Belt and Road Initiative was launched in 2013, Liu Gaoqiong, a professor from China's Nanjing Agricultural University, had spent 16 years in Kenya. Liu moved to the East African country in 1997 through the exchange program, "China-Kenya High Education Cooperation Project".

One of the important aspects of the BRI in the educational cooperation between China and Africa is the people-to-people connection in which educational exchanges are a crucial element. As such, Liu found himself well positioned to contribute to this aspect because since his arrival in Kenya, he had overseen several such collaborative projects to fruition.

In 1994, three years before Liu's arrival in Kenya, Nanjing Agricultural University and Kenya's Egerton University had jointly implemented the Sino-Kenya Higher Education Cooperation Plan and established a biotechnology laboratory and the Sino-Kenya Horticultural Technology Cooperation Center at Egerton University.

Since he is stationed at Egerton University's Department of Crops, Horticulture and Soils, Liu has helped in overseeing several exchanges of knowledge, students and lecturers between China and Kenya. However, the BRI brought in a wider perspective and more opportunities for collaboration and that is how the Kenya-China Joint Laboratory for Crop Molecular Biology at Egerton University was established in collaboration with China's Nanjing Agricultural University.

"During my early days at Egerton University, we introduced greenhouse technology to the department. Later on, we introduced biotechnology and the collaboration has grown to the point that we have now introduced the molecular biotechnology laboratory," Liu said.

The Kenya-China Joint Laboratory for Crop Molecular Biology at Egerton University began in 2019 with an aim to equip the lab with state-of-the-art facilities, train staff and students, engage in staff and student exchange programs, and engage in joint research and publications.

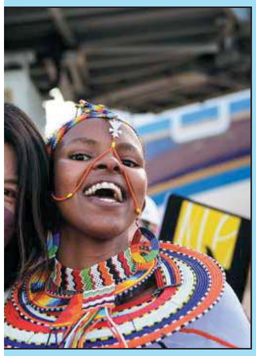
Liu said that they felt the need to establish the lab because by employing the latest advancements in technology, research becomes more effective and easier. He gave examples of cassava food products research currently being conducted by students at the lab as a testament to its importance in advancing agricultural technology while address-

Left: Liu Gaoqiong (second from left), a professor at Nanjing Agricultura... China Joint Laboratory for Crop Molecular Biology at Egerton University... Laboratory for Crop Molecular Biology. PHOTOS BY XIE SONGXIN / CHINA DAILY

…elt and Road Initiative. A decade of practice has demonstrated that it's a broad …'s common development. In a more than 10-part series, China Daily finds out … on and civilization will contribute more to the shared future of mankind.

…APS REAL …IDENDS

…y benefits from …ucture, improved …petitiveness



… a photo with a Maasai … International Airport in … XINHUA

… operated by tech giant Tencent, has developed a regional footprint by partnering with Equity Bank, giving customers another option to settle payments.

Recently, Service On New Grounds, a Chinese company focusing on regulatory affairs, accounting, finance, tax and advisory services, listed Kenya among 69 countries that accept WeChat cross-border payments.

Adhere said the WeChat cross-border payments will be critical in terms of promoting e-commerce, terming it as an opportunity for more trade between China and Kenya.

The BRI has also seen China become the leading destination for young Kenyans furthering their education overseas, thus promoting people-to-people exchanges, he said.

Adhere said Kenya, as well as other African countries, can ride on the BRI to address any trade deficit with China by taking advantage of the existing waterways, highways and railways to serve its international markets.

Agro-based trade also offers many opportunities through China's green lane move, which is aimed at increasing the uptake of more African products into the Chinese market, he said.

"In this venture, we saw Kenya becoming the first African country to export fresh avocados to the Chinese market last year. This has given a lot of hope for avocado farmers across the country as well as Chinese consumers," he said.

Kenya and China are implementing agro-based operations around poverty alleviation and the BRI provides frameworks through trade to promote African produce in the Chinese market, Adhere said.

He also called for promoting greater people-to-people understanding between the two sides.

"China and Africa have a responsibility to ensure that their citizens are reading from the same script, which can be achieved through cultural exchanges, partnership and collaboration, especially between young people.

"This will ensure that they understand and support China-Kenya collaborations. It will also help in avoiding some of the negative rhetoric that has defined the China-Kenya relationship, which sometimes is not driven by Chinese or Africans but third parties."

The telecommunication sector also offers an important route to strengthen China-Kenya cooperation, he said.

This can be achieved through e-commerce, internet protocol implementation and investment in the ICT sector to promote communication and collaboration between China and Kenya.

He said the future of the BRI is very bright and it has revealed the integration potential for Africa, with the continent significantly benefiting from the initiative — Chinese firms have contributed more than 20 percent of Africa's economic development in the last decade.

"Large networks of transportation, energy and telecommunication projects have been implemented in partnership with China. We have not hit the ceiling yet, we have a lot more to gain through working together," he said.

Despite its heavy borrowing, Adhere said Kenya is at a lower risk of credit fault because of the political will to ensure that it observes its international obligations, including debt payment.

"Despite its debt challenges, Kenya is a very innovative and resilient economy. Up to 60 percent of Kenya's GDP is found in the services sector. Services as an industry relies on innovation so as we see more innovation, more young people becoming tech savvy, it means that the Kenyan economy will remain more resilient," he said.

Macharia Munene, a professor of history and international relations at the United States International University, Nairobi, said the BRI has had a very positive impact on Kenya in terms of communication and accessibility across sectors.

"The BRI has opened up remote areas that were previously inaccessible, leading to wealth creation and consequently reducing poverty," he said.

"In terms of operation, the SGR is very efficient, people are very happy and transportation has been eased and should be extended beyond the country. It enriches areas where it passes."

Munene said railways are public services, as opposed to purely profit-making entities, but when managed well, they can reap significant benefits.

"A public railway system opens up and creates opportunities for people to create wealth, hence it's a strategic investment, not in terms of profit but in the services it offers to the country," he said.

A freight train runs on the Mombasa-Nairobi Railway track in Mombasa on July 27, 2022. WANG TENG / XINHUA

…s eased traffic congestion at the Likoni crossing channel located on the southern tip of Mombasa; people celebrate the opening of the Mombasa- …ctivity to Kenya. PHOTOS BY DONG JIANGHUI / XINHUA; LI YAN / XINHUA; SONG FANGCAN / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

Partnership poised for further economic growth

By OTIATO OPALI
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With the global financial scene evolving as Kenya pushes for stronger bilateral ties with its key trading partners, China remains among the top business and development partners for the East African economic powerhouse.

According to data from an economic survey conducted by the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, China remained the single leading source of Kenya's imports in 2021 and 2022, accounting for 20.5 percent of total imports valued at over $4.03 billion in 2021.

Despite some analysts pointing out a significant trade deficit when it comes to imports and exports between the two countries, experts have argued that exports from Kenya to China have markedly improved over the past decade, signaling an increase in trade.

The Kenya National Bureau of Statistics indicates that in 2013, the country's exports to China stood at slightly below $50 million but rose to more than $200 million in 2021.

Timothy Odongo, a manager in charge of investment at the Kenya Private Sector Alliance, said that investments from China have been steadily increasing in the last 10 years since China's Belt and Road Initiative was established.

"China-Kenya trade is poised for further growth as the economy recovers from COVID-19 effects and international freight costs drop further this year. We expect to see lower import prices because shippers are reporting freight costs in the shipping industry have fallen by up to 50 percent on key trading routes like Asia," Odongo said.

He added that in the past 10 years, trade between China and Kenya has improved not just in terms of quantity but also in terms of the type of merchandise being traded between the two countries.

Odongo said that in 2013, Kenya was mainly exporting fabrics, textiles and fertilizers to China but 10 years later, the number of products being exported to China has increased to include ores, minerals and a wide array of agricultural products.

"The same is true if you look at the products we import from China. Back in 2013, our main imports from China were machinery and consumer goods such as electronics. However, in 2021, Kenya's main imports from China included nuclear reactors, industrial boilers, iron, steel and vehicles," Odongo said.

He added this shows that over the past decade, trade between the two countries has played a big role in establishing facilities that can help Kenya improve its status as a manufacturer. This is because imports from China are shifting from consumer goods to capital goods, which can be used in manufacturing other goods.

Nancy Muthoni Githaiga, a Kenyan scholar and researcher, said it is clear that China is a major source of Kenya's imports, mainly of manufactured goods, while Kenya's exports to China are minimal and consist mainly of raw goods, with a very small percentage of manufactured goods.

Multiple factors

"Various factors could explain the rapid increase in the import of industrial goods to Kenya from China. The first is increasingly large-scale infrastructure projects in Kenya, most of which are funded by China. The growth of the infrastructure sector in Kenya has increased significantly over the past decade with the implementation of significant energy and transport infrastructure projects under Kenya Vision 2030," Githaiga said.

"A significant number of such projects are carried out by Chinese companies, such as the Standard Gauge Railway connecting Mombasa and Nairobi by China Road and Bridge Corporation, the construction of Lamu Port berths by China Communications Construction Company and Northern Corridor Integration projects among others," she added.

Despite China's minimal imports from Kenya, Githaiga said that exports of manufactured goods from Kenya to China have gradually increased since the implementation of the Belt and Road Initiative. This could be explained by factors like China's zero-tariff policy on exports from the least developed countries with which it has diplomatic relations.

"As the two countries strive to bridge the bilateral trade gap, Kenya needs to add value to its exports. China offers opportunities that Kenya should take advantage of like developing the infrastructure needed for the desired competitiveness, technology transfer, an increase in the commodity market, and entrepreneurial skills development," Githaiga said.

To attain this, she said the two countries can share experiences, particularly the teachings emanating from China's development and industrialization process.

…ing crop production

…al University, conducts experiments with his students at the Kenya- … **Right:** Chickpea seeds developed by the Kenya-China Joint

…ing food security and nutrition security in Kenya.

"We have PhD and master's degree students at the molecular lab who have successfully developed new varieties of cassava, beans, chickpeas, groundnuts and other products which are then distributed to farmers to improve their yields. The suitability and function of our cassava variety are being targeted at dry and semiarid areas to address food security," Liu said.

According to Richard Mulwa, professor of horticulture at Egerton University and director of the molecular lab, the establishment of the laboratory is a significant achievement and its potential to impact crop production in the region is immense.

"Earlier on, our research in terms of crop development was traditional and conventional but with molecular biology, we can select traits directly from DNA signals that we see could be responsible for particular traits. So instead of dealing with a whole plant observation in the field, we have reduced it to the molecular level where we do gene observation and isolation to get the traits we desire in the crops," Mulwa said.

Mulwa, whose partnership with Nanjing Agricultural University dates back to 1995, said he is proud to have witnessed the collaboration grows.

"Our partnership started with Chinese experts being sent to Egerton University as resident professors and moved to the exchange of PhD students from Egerton to study at Nanjing Agricultural University as part of our staff development. Currently, close to 50 percent of staff at Egerton's crops, horticulture and soils department have undergone higher studies in China," Mulwa said.

He added that the establishment of the lab was timely because most of the scientists who advance their knowledge in China have a place to come back to and apply the knowledge they have gained. In addition, the collaboration between Nanjing Agricultural University and Egerton has now expanded beyond the crops, horticulture and soils department to include other disciplines, such as agricultural engineering and agriculture economy.

Raising profile

"At the institutional level, the lab has raised our profile as a university because we have a state-of-the-art laboratory which many institutions lack. We have, therefore, become a collaborative training center for other institutions in the region," Mulwa said.

Since the lab was established in 2019, six PhD and 13 master's students have graduated from the department. Currently, eight PhD and 16 master's students are in session. Through the research by these students, the university has been able to develop numerous varieties of crops that are passed down to local farmers to help solve problems like drought, diseases and yields.

Bernard Nyongesa Sichangi, a master's student in plant biotechnology, said the lab has played a great role in helping him attain his career objectives of contributing to increased food production and development of climate-smart crops in the country.

"In my current project, I am working on cassava tissue culture in order to produce enough and high-quality planting material for farmers. … We also have experts from China at the university to train us on how to use the equipment in addition to online classes we conduct in collaboration with Nanjing Agricultural University," Sichangi said.

To make their research complete, Egerton has also established an Agro-Science Park whose overall mandate is the promotion of innovations, products and services developed at the molecular lab to be commercialized and linking the research with industry for uptake of these products.

Paul Kimurto, the Agro-Science Park director, said Nanjing Agricultural University funded the park to the tune of $130,000 to enable them to convert their research into real solutions for farmers.

"The Agro-Science Park is expected to transform the products from research into commercialization. We, therefore, engage farmers by training them and carrying out demonstrations on how to get the best out of the products we come up with," Kimurto said.

According to Liu, since its establishment, the lab has hosted several short virtual training sessions in conjunction with Nanjing Agricultural University and the lab's capabilities have been steadily improving, with staff and students benefiting from collaborations with international molecular biology and biotechnology experts.

He added that such collaborations have led to a better understanding between Kenyan and Chinese people, citing the establishment of the Confucius Institute at Egerton in 2012.

He urged both sides to focus on the many strengths they share instead of focusing on differences as they work toward a shared future.

Watch the video by scanning the code

COMMENT

Editorials

Netherlands' focus should not be on Washington's crises-creating agenda

Dutch Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Wopke Hoekstra visited China on Tuesday and Wednesday, and discussed bilateral relations with Vice-President Han Zheng and State Councilor and Foreign Minister Qin Gang.

The talks, which both sides agreed were "candid", were no doubt constructive and conducive to clearing misgivings as Beijing strives to protect the once thriving China-Netherlands trade ties from disruption by an impending United States-led tech-trade embargo aimed at stymieing China's chipmaking capabilities, with the Netherlands expected to announce corresponding measures at the insistence of Washington.

Considering Japan has already decided to restrict exports of 23 types of semiconductor manufacturing equipment from July, there may be little chance of the Netherlands not following suit under the mounting pressure from the US. But as it has acknowledged, going too far would be lose-lose for both China and itself.

Telling reporters that China "has serious concerns" about "the issue of lithography machines", Qin urged the Netherlands to "work together to jointly protect the normal trade order between us, the international trade rules and to jointly keep the global industrial and supply chains stable". Han reiterated the same position on Wednesday when he held talks with the Dutch guest.

The Netherlands is China's second-largest trading partner in the EU. Last year, the total value of trade between them was 84 billion euros ($90.12 billion). Besides expressing China's willingness to expand bilateral cooperation, Qin told his guest that China hopes the Netherlands continues to play the role of the "portal" for China-Europe cooperation.

If Amsterdam, as Hoekstra stated, does follow a line of diplomatic independence, it should try to avoid a completely unnecessary confrontation. Particularly as China is "absolutely" a priority partner of his country, as he said at a news conference on Tuesday. As he pointed out, "… managing our joint interests, and also managing our differences is crucial, for effective cooperation". The cooperation, as he elaborated, extends from bilateral concerns to global ones, where he said China has a "pivotal role".

A mature relationship and effective cooperation between two sovereign countries should not be subject to wanton third-party interference. It is Washington sticking its oar in every issue that is responsible for the present troubles facing China and the Netherlands. "What China exports is opportunity, not crisis," said Qin. And Hoekstra knows that very well. But Amsterdam's present approach to cooperation with China is more akin to Washington's, which is increasingly driven by suspicion and fear of an allegedly rules-defying China. With Washington dictating the approach, the obstacles to China-Netherlands cooperation and China-EU cooperation will be difficult to overcome.

Amsterdam should not let Washington steer the Netherlands' trade policy in the wrong direction.

Microsoft's report keeps it in the family

In a statement issued on Wednesday, the US company Microsoft claimed a Chinese government hacking group has acquired a significant foothold inside critical infrastructure environments throughout the US and Guam and is stealing network credentials and sensitive data while remaining largely undetectable.

The company alleges that the group to which it has given the name "Volt Typhoon" is pursuing the development of capabilities that could "disrupt critical communications infrastructure between the United States and the Asian region during future crises".

Although Microsoft's network security threat monitoring technology is no doubt world-class, the murky relations between such US internet giants and the US government, as exposed by the US whistle-blower Edward Snowden, makes such readouts nothing more than political propaganda.

Almost at the same time, the US National Security Agency, the FBI, the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency and their counterparts in Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the United Kingdom published a joint advisory sharing technical details on "the recently discovered cluster of activity".

The seamless connections among these security agencies mean they can all weigh in on the claims to give them a semblance of credibility.

Given the universality of hacking activities today that are organized, implemented and funded by various parties for different purposes, they are not difficult to be spotted. Yet the challenge is how to find the real sponsors of these cyberattacks.

That's why the US government feels no qualms about running the largest hackers' empire in the world, as Snowden revealed. Were it not for the disclosure of the former employee and subcontractor of the NSA, it would have been almost impossible for the other countries to have acquired hard evidence to prove the numerous global surveillance programs sponsored by Washington.

US internet companies, media organizations and government departments, such as the NSA, and the Five Eyes intelligence alliance are the foursome on the stage to make the show complete. They have different roles to play in the process. This time, after Microsoft fired the first shot, the chief analyst at Google's Mandiant cybersecurity intelligence operation told the US media that Microsoft's announcement is "potentially a really important finding".

However, no matter how many technical details the chorus has provided, the choir has stopped short of explaining on what grounds it has determined the hacker group is "state-sponsored" by China.

The moniker "Volt Typhoon" that Microsoft gave the group is according to its own "taxonomy". It gives the hackings it discovers family names — Typhoon, Blizzard, Sleet and Sandstorm for Beijing, Moscow, Pyongyang and Teheran — along with modifiers according to what it thinks are their purposes and degrees. The point is the company, which tasks itself "to empower every person and every organization on the planet to achieve more" and regularly issues independent reports warning the world against cybersecurity threats, only targets these few countries, and does not even bother to give a family name to the huge numbers of US-sponsored hackings.

Such reports on "family activities" are extremely fishy: red herrings that stink to high heaven.

Tokyo applies for job as doorman for NATO

At their summit in Madrid last year, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization leaders endorsed a new Strategic Concept, the first since 2010, that highlighted the extent to which the transatlantic alliance has become a tool of proxified aggression for Washington.

Although NATO's core purpose is supposedly to ensure the collective defense of the allies, the organization's new concept highlights that rather than being a catalyst for strategic risk reduction, it now serves as the spearhead for the US' belligerent strategy aimed at suppressing Russia and China.

Signaling the alliance would significantly bolster its aggressive posture by ensuring a substantial and persistent forward-deployed presence "on land, at sea, and in the air", the concept makes clear that the alliance, not content with the conflict it has provoked in Europe, now has its trouble-making sights set on the "Indo-Pacific".

And with Tokyo hoping to take a free ride on Washington's strategy to realize the country's full militarization, this is being facilitated by Japan.

Although Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida claimed on Wednesday that the country had no plans to become a NATO member, he acknowledged NATO was planning to open a liaison office in Japan. Japanese Ambassador to the United States Koji Tomita and Foreign Minister Yoshimasa Hayashi had revealed, on May 9 and 10 respectively, that Japan and NATO were discussing the details for establishing a liaison office.

Kishida is pushing his nation in all ways closer to the US-led military alliance. He attended last year's NATO summit in Madrid. And Kishida is also reportedly planning to attend the coming session in Vilnius, capital of Lithuania, in July, which might herald Japan's permanent participation.

The liaison office in Tokyo will be NATO's first in Asia. Once in place, it will grant Japan an important position in NATO's global arrangement as it will act as a transit station for the flow of information between NATO's headquarters in Europe and countries in the Asia-Pacific such as the Republic of Korea, Australia and New Zealand, that Washington is trying to rally to its cause.

Japan becoming the doorkeeper for NATO in Asia will come at the cost of the militarization of the Asia-Pacific region and the ruining of Japan's relations with its neighbors. The Asia-Pacific does not welcome bloc confrontation and Japan needs to act with its due prudence. Certainly, Tokyo should be mindful that in its desire to play a leading role in regional affairs it may prove to be fatally attractive to Washington as a pawn in its games.

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Cai Meng

Opinion Line

Tibet's development tight slap against rumors of rights abuse

People's happiness is the greatest human right, and development is the key to realizing people's happiness, as stated by President Xi Jinping in a congratulatory letter to a forum on the development of Tibet.

Tibet was peacefully liberated on May 23, 1951, smashing the plot of foreign forces to separate Tibet from China. Since then, the democratic reform in Tibet has emancipated millions of serfs, fully protecting their human rights and enabling them to truly become the masters of the state and society.

In 2022, Tibet's GDP was 346.8 times that in 1951, and the average life expectancy has risen from 35.5 years at the beginning of the peaceful liberation to 72.19 years now. Illiteracy has basically been eliminated from over 95 percent illiteracy before its liberation.

In the past 10 years, Tibet has invested more than 80 percent of its annual fiscal revenue in areas related to people's livelihood, setting up a comprehensive security system covering education, healthcare, elderly care and other fields.

With the central government's support, Tibet lifted itself out of absolute poverty in 2019 and built a moderately prosperous society in all respects. There is a consensus among farmers and herdsmen in Tibet that their hometown is seeing high-quality development, and human rights protection has brought profound changes.

The booming development of China's digital economy has injected new impetus into Tibet's economy. In 2022, Tibet's industrial and digital output accounted for 19 percent of its GDP and a series of digital economy projects have been implemented and the application of new infrastructure has accelerated, unleashing Tibet's development potential.

As the headwaters of many major rivers in Asia, the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau is an important ecological security barrier in Asia and even has a significant impact on global climate change. Therefore, China regards the protection of the plateau environment as a redline for Tibet's development. Not surprisingly, Tibet now has one of the best ecological environments in the world.

Despite Tibet's ever-better development, some Western politicians keep hyping up the so-called human rights issue. If Tibet closely integrates its development with that of the rest of the country, human rights in Tibet will be further improved and the lives of Tibetan people will improve. In the face of such facts, the gossip that smears Tibet will eventually dissipate.

— CHINA MEDIA GROUP

TikTok shows a way to counter bias

TikTok, which has a glorious record of defending its legal rights and interests, has filed a lawsuit against Montana's Attorney General Austin Knudson and his office over a fresh ban on downloading the TikTok app in Montana, the United States.

Montana Governor Brian Schweitzer signed a bill on May 17, forbidding people in the region from downloading the app on their smartphones. Those supporting the ban list "security concern" as a reason, even though anybody who has ever used the app for even an hour will know that it is mainly used for leisure activities.

Certain US politicians want to ban the app because its parent company is based in China, but the lawsuit has been filed by a US-based corporation against a US State-level government. Actually, on May 17, the day Governor Schweitzer signed the bill banning TikTok, five account holders raised lawsuits against the local government. Many legal experts say the ban is unconstitutional and violates several US laws.

Also, the lawsuit has not been filed by China against the US, but by US residents and a US corporation against an unfair decision taken by the US government.

The case fully shows how the US government is hurting the interests of all by treating an app as an enemy.

TikTok is only one of the apps with a Chinese connection to have been banned by the US. Similarly, ByteDance is one of many Chinese companies that suffered from discrimination in the US. The lawsuit marks a good start to remind them of the possibility of solving the problems through judicial means in the US.

There are plenty of supporters in the US to help them, which serves the interests of all.

— ZHANG ZHOUXIANG, CHINA DAILY

What They Say

Seoul blasts Biden administration's sci-tech scattershot

According to the proposed "guardrail" rules for the CHIPS Act issued by the US Commerce Department on March 21, companies receiving US subsidies will have to return the entire funding if they engage in significant transactions involving the material expansion of semiconductor manufacturing capacity in some foreign countries including China.

Reportedly, the Republic of Korea government is urging Washington to review those "guardrail" rules, worrying that they will restrict the operations of some of its enterprises in China.

According to the rules, the US government is demanding that ROK chip companies receiving its subsidies do not build new facilities in China or some other countries on its blacklist that exceed five percent of their existing production capacity.

Seoul thinks that the rules are placing an unreasonable burden on related ROK companies investing in China, demanding that the ceiling should be raised to 10 percent at least.

Although the ROK government declined to comment on the matter to avoid offending Washington, it is a clear sign that it wants ROK semiconductor giants such as Samsung and SK to further expand their semiconductor production in China while receiving US subsidies.

In its pursuit of primacy, the US is overstretching the concept of national security, abusing export control measures, and fragmenting the industrial chains at the expense of countries such as the ROK.

The "guardrails" to be built by the US are sci-tech blockade measures and protectionist in nature that will impede the world's economic recovery and development, as Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin said at a regular news conference in Beijing in March. The US' attempts to preserve its sci-tech primacy at the expense of normal international economic cooperation will only backfire.

The ROK, along with other parties affected by the US' "guardrails", should proceed from its own long-term interests and in the interest of a fair and equitable marketplace, abide by international economic and trade rules, work with China to jointly safeguard the stability of global industrial and supply chains and defend the shared interests of all parties.

Containment and suppression cannot hold back China's development. Instead, it will only strengthen China's resolve and capability to seek self-reliance and technological innovation.

— LI YANG, CHINA DAILY

VIEWS

Li Jin

Tibet boarding schools good for education

The right to education is key to a person's overall development. For underdeveloped regions and minority groups, education plays an important role in fostering their development. And building more boarding schools in impoverished areas will create more educational opportunities for the children from poor families.

Boarding schools primarily enroll students from rural, pastoral and remote mountainous areas. While students are admitted to primary schools on the basis of geographical proximity, a relatively centralized approach is adopted for admissions to middle schools.

When it comes to admitting Tibetan students, priority is given to children from low-income or nomadic families, and those from extremely remote areas. To meet the needs of education for such students, the government has built boarding facilities, recruited qualified teachers, and provides living allowances to ensure they complete the nine-year compulsory education.

Since the 1950s, Tibetan parents, like the rest of the parents in China, inspired by the modernization of Chinese society, have been paying greater attention to their children's education. Despite the extremely limited national resources during the 1950s, the central government established many boarding schools in remote areas where building materials were not easily available, not least because the local people wanted their children to be educated.

Given the limited educational resources, the number of boarding schools built at the time was not enough to meet the demand. Yet the government recruited qualified teachers to teach the students, built the needed infrastructure, and provided students with basic living allowance. Many children of farmers and herdsmen from remote areas who received education in boarding schools later became managers and professionals, which promoted the cause of education nationwide and prompted many Tibetan parents to send their children to boarding schools to seek education.

The number of boarding schools in the Tibet autonomous region started increasing, and running schools became easier following the launch of reform and opening-up in the late 1970s. It is heartening to note that Tibetan parents, in general, now realize the importance of boarding schools. In many parts of Tibet, especially in Lhasa, parents hold celebratory banquets for friends and relatives when their children enter a boarding school.

In boarding schools that Tibetan students attend, both the national language and Tibetan language are taught, and students who complete their studies have the opportunity to pursue higher education in college. As for Tibetan parents, they know that children who receive quality education are better-

Overall, the education choices made by Tibetan parents for their children have been influenced by social trends. So they prefer that their children acquire modern education, instead of traditional Tibetan monastic education.

placed to succeed in life.

For example, Gonpo from Zayu county in Tibet completed his middle school and high school education in a boarding school. He went on to study at China University of Political Science and Law and Minzu University of China to earn his bachelor's and master's degrees. He then returned to Tibet University to teach. At present, he is a doctoral candidate at Sichuan University. While his ability to use a foreign language and Tibetan historical materials for research has been lauded by the academic community, his personal development trajectory encourages Tibetan parents to send their children to boarding schools to seek education.

Due to the establishment of a Tibetan language teaching and research system from the primary school to the university level, the majority of teachers and administrators in boarding schools are from the Tibetan ethnic group. They not only impart knowledge to students but also cultivate among them a positive attitude and encourage them to preserve traditional culture.

Ngodrup is a leading figure in the Lhasa Ngari Hebei Complete Middle School's history department. Born in Gongbo Gyamda county in Nyingchi, he completed his middle school and high school education in boarding facilities, and then got admission to Beijing Normal University for his undergraduate education. After graduating, he has been teaching in a school near Shiquan River for seven years, and often uses his own personal development experience to motivate students to pursue higher education.

Since 2000, due to continuous investments, Tibet now has enough boarding schools to meet the education demand of students' parents. Tibetan parents usually consider three factors when choosing a school for their kids: quality of education, the school's ability to enhance students' communication skills in both Chinese and Tibetan languages, and school fees and other education costs.

Since the autumn semester of 2018, Tibet has been providing annual living allowances of 3,000-6,000 yuan ($425-850) for students studying in boarding schools depending on the altitude of the area where the students live and the category of the school and students. These allowances alleviate the financial burden of the parents and help students from poor families to acquire quality education.

Overall, the education choices made by Tibetan parents for their children have been influenced by social trends. So they prefer that their children acquire modern education, instead of traditional Tibetan monastic education.

Boarding schools are relatively inexpensive and provide quality education for students from disadvantaged backgrounds, such as poor families, nomadic families, and students from remote mountainous areas. Such schools have also been beneficial to students in terms of personal development. And the rising expectations of parents have prompted the boarding schools to continuously raise their teaching standards and improve their education resources.

The author is a professor at the Center for Tibetan Studies of Sichuan University. The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

JIN DING / CHINA DAILY

Furkan Halit Yolcu

Geopolitics driving West's renewed virus game

Many meetings are being held and speeches delivered during the 76th World Health Assembly in Geneva, Switzerland, from May 21 to 30, focusing on the global health agenda.

However, one of the main developments preceding the 76th WHA was US Secretary of State Antony Blinken's call to include Taiwan in the annual meeting as an observer, which threatened to shift the focus from the main event.

Since Blinken knows full well that the island's authorities cannot attend the WHA even as observers because of the one-China principle, which the United Nations, the WHO and the United State acknowledge, his call was meant to intensify international political rivalry rather than taking forward the theme of this year's assembly — "WHO at 75: Saving Lives, Driving Health for All".

The world is still struggling to recover from the devastating impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. But instead of helping the global recovery, some countries are trying to renew the debate on the origin of the novel coronavirus. In particular, some people in the United States-led West has been hyping up the possibility of the virus leaking from a lab in China, ignoring the conclusion of the WHO-China investigation that nearly ruled out such a possibility.

Since some Western powers, especially the US, feel threatened by China's growing global influence, they seek to smear China and damage its international image.

As such, the renewed Western claim is the result of the geopolitical games the US has been indulging in, rather than being a genuine effort to find the truth and promote further research in order to better prepare the world to deal with pandemics in the future.

Those in the West making such wild claims seem to have a hidden agenda, as they conveniently ignore the opinions of countless scientists based on empirical evidence. Their haphazard reasoning undermines the credibility of the scientific process, fostering a toxic atmosphere rife with conspiracy theories and unsubstantiated claims.

Besides, those propagating the lab leak theory have never talked about scrutinizing the high-security labs like the one in the army base of Fort Detrick in Maryland. The Fort Detrick facility has been accused of a safety breach and potentially releasing dangerous pathogens into the atmosphere. But instead of seeking an investigation into these accusations, the proponents of the lab leak theory do exactly the opposite, ignoring the unexplained increase in lung diseases in the vicinity of Fort Detrick. If this is not double standard, what is?

In contrast to the US approach, China has exhibited transparency in its handling of the pandemic right from the early days.

China's cooperation with international organizations and other countries became clearer when it invited a team of international experts associated with the WHO to investigate the origin of the virus. That was a commendable attempt to find an answer through scientific means.

China has also shown solidarity with the international community in the face of the global devastation caused by the pandemic. It has donated millions of COVID-19 vaccines to a number of developing countries, and supported efforts to stem the spread of the virus in areas with limited access to the vaccines. Such humanitarian actions reflect China's commitment to help improve global health and recognize that fighting the pandemic requires collective action.

The West's renewed focus on the lab leak claim is nothing but a geopolitical maneuver. As the US perceives China to be a challenge to its global hegemony, it is coercing its allies to consolidate the US-led anti-China forces to check China's peaceful rise.

Since some Western powers, especially the US, feel threatened by China's growing global influence, they seek to smear China and damage its international image.

In short, the renewed allegations against China in relation to the virus need to be critically examined in the context of geopolitical dynamics and political motivations. Scientific consensus and comprehensive research by the WHO support the finding that COVID-19 is a zoonotic disease. So the Western countries must address their contradictions and allow transparent investigations into their military and lab facilities.

Global cooperation is essential to helping the international community to be well prepared to handle medical emergencies in the future, so the US-led bloc should not sacrifice the truth at the altar of geopolitical maneuvering.

The writer is a research assistant at the Sakarya University Middle East Institute, Turkiye. The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

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China and US should reverse downward spiral of bilateral ties

As someone who covered China-US relations during former US president Barack Obama's eight years in office and the first year and a half of the Donald Trump administration, it's still hard to comprehend how bilateral ties have deteriorated so fast.

Bilateral relations have nosedived since Trump reversed the US' decades-old China policy. Incumbent US President Joe Biden, who during his presidential campaign blasted Trump's trade and tariff war, has broken his promise of changing Trump's China policy. Instead, he has doubled down on export control by putting more Chinese companies on the Entity List and coercing US allies to join the US-led anti-China front under his "democracy versus autocracy" campaign.

The United States' desperate attempts to curb China's technology development and provocations on the Taiwan question have caused many to worry about a new Cold War, which could lead to a hot war between the two largest economies, a conflict that will spell disaster for humankind.

In an interview with The Economist, published on May 17, former US secretary of state Henry Kissinger, who will celebrate his 100th birthday on Saturday, warned that "we're in the classic pre-World War One situation ... where neither side has much margin of political concession and in which any disturbance of the equilibrium can lead to catastrophic consequences".

The downward spiral of Sino-US relations would stop if Biden musters the courage to resist the China hawks in Washington.

Kissinger said that the fate of humankind depends on whether the US and China can get along well, and they have only five to 10 years to find a way. Accusing Trump and Biden of overturning the understanding China and the US reached during the Richard Nixon administration, Kissinger said the US trade agenda has been hijacked by China hawks who are unwilling to give China any room to take forward its economic development.

In a recent interview to Goldman Sachs' "Top Mind", Harvard University professor Graham Allison criticized the US, saying its response to the rapid rise of China shows it is suffering from the "ruling power syndrome".

Neither Kissinger nor Allison believes China is seeking global domination, contrary to what many Western politicians allege. China, in their view, just wants to be a powerful country.

However, Biden said on Sunday following the G7 summit that he believes US-China relations may begin to "thaw very shortly". The downward spiral of Sino-US relations would stop if Biden musters the courage to resist the China hawks in Washington. It will be difficult, though, given that Republicans and Democrats have been trying to outdo each other in their anti-China rhetoric and actions with an eye on the 2024 presidential election.

The US' trade war against China has been a lose-lose game for both, according to many US economists. The same is true for the US' tech war, as the administration has forced many US companies to restrict exports to China, thereby drastically reducing revenue from a major source.

The recent talks between senior officials of the two countries and the arrival in Washington of new Chinese ambassador Xie Feng this week, however, are widely seen as moves in the right direction for "thawing" bilateral relations. But much more needs to be done to prevent the most consequential bilateral ties from veering toward more confrontations, and even conflict.

Leaders on both sides need to show the same wisdom and courage that Nixon and Kissinger on the one hand and Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai on the other showed in the early 1970s, in order to not only avoid the "Thucydides trap" but also expand cooperation on a wide range of bilateral, regional and global issues, where cooperation between the two countries can be beneficial to their peoples and those beyond.

China-US cooperation has benefited both countries as well as the world, so it doesn't make sense for them to engage in zero-sum games which make both worse off.

The scenic belt along the Jinyang Bridge section of the Fenhe River is a new tourist attraction in Taiyuan. PHOTOS BY LI ZHAOMIN / FOR CHINA DAILY

Success flows from river's transformation projects

Residents and tourists embrace beauty and ecological improvements of Fenhe scenic area

China Shanxi

By YUAN SHENGGAO

Early summer is the best season for the Fenhe River in Taiyuan. Surrounded by lush vegetation, its lucent waters resemble a jade belt winding through the provincial capital of Shanxi province.

The Fenhe is the second-largest river in Shanxi and the second-largest tributary of the Yellow River. It is known as the mother river of Shanxi. The Taiyuan section of the Fenhe River stretches 188 kilometers, with 43 km passing through the urban area.

Zhang Pingguo is the head of the administration committee of the Fenhe River scenic area. Every time when talking about the river, he said the Fenhe is the pride of Taiyuan residents.

"The entire stretch of the 43-km river in urban Taiyuan is a scenic belt that draws in millions of visitors every year and an ecological corridor protecting the environmental well-being of Taiyuan," Zhang said.

The Fenhe scenic area, which is managed by Zhang's committee, has a total area of 20 square kilometers, including 8.5 sq km of greened embankments and a water surface of 11.5 sq km.

"The water volume of this river section is about 30 million cubic meters, equaling to a medium-sized reservoir," Zhang said. "Such a volume can rarely be seen in cities in the north of China."

The official said the river and its adjacent green spaces are playing a crucial role in Taiyuan's ecological environment, especially in the fields of flood control, air purification and temperature conditioning.

But several decades ago, the Fenhe was a polluted river with an environment totally different from what it looks like today, according to local officials and residents.

Lin Hao is a native of Taiyuan. He said he is a witness to the river's

Flocks of egrets are spotted on the Fenhe River in Taiyuan.

changes over the past decades.

"We were told by the seniors that the Fenhe is a scenic river in history with eight famed scenic attractions in its Taiyuan section," Lin said.

However, because of overuse of water, a decrease in vegetation coverage and industrial pollution, the river lost its historical glamor several decades ago.

"The period spanning the 1980s-90s was the worst time for the Fenhe," Lin said. "It was a dry river for the majority of the year, or polluted with yellowish, odorous water for the rest of it."

He said the deterioration of the river was the result of pollution from coal-related industries in nearby regions. "This was also evidenced by a landscape blackened by coal dust," he said. "The trees along the river and even the sparrows on the trees were black."

The water supply began to shrink in the 1970s, leading to substantial decreases in runoff volume and worsening water quality.

Changes began to take place in the late 1990s, when Taiyuan launched environmental improvement projects for the river, with local authorities focusing their efforts on pollution control and increasing water supply to the river, according to Zhang.

In addition to the main stream of the Fenhe, environmental improvement projects have also been implemented for its nine branches, with a focus on pollution control and sewage treatment.

"We began to see fundamental improvement in water quality in 2020, with the elimination of water bodies with a quality worse than Class V in all the Fenhe's drainage areas in Taiyuan," Zhang said.

Surface water quality in China is divided into five classes, with Class V being the worst and Class I being the best.

But that was only the beginning. In 2022, the Fenhe River and all its tributaries in Taiyuan reported water qualities better than Class III, according to data released by the Taiyuan bureau of ecology and environmental protection.

There were also efforts to improve the ecosystem through increasing water supply to the river and greening the lands in its vicinity.

The Fenhe began to have steady runoff in 2000 and the water supply has been further ensured and stabilized with a water diversion project starting from the Wanjiazhai Dam on the upper reaches of the Yellow River beginning to supply water to the Fenhe in 2017.

There are also greening and landscaping projects to beautify the scenic area. Trees and grasses have been planted and pavilions and bridges have been built along the river.

"With lushly vegetated hills and clear waters, we just feel we are living in a garden-like city you can see elsewhere in the south and east of China," said local resident Lyu Hong, who has recently developed a hobby to take pictures in the Fenhe River scenic area.

The scenic area has now formed a pleasantly unique ecosystem for both humans and wildlife.

More than 230 varieties of plants have been growing along the river, the pedestrian paths and the cycling roads, making the scenic area increasingly appealing to relaxing, exercising and sightseeing visitors.

The wetlands along the river are also the habitat for more than 160 species of wild birds, including such rare varieties as the swan, egret, heron and spot-billed duck.

A total of 24 bridges have been built across the river to offer convenience for pedestrians, cyclists and commuting passengers. Among these bridges, the most beautiful is the Jinyang Bridge.

Jinyang Bridge, featuring two rainbow-shaped arches, has become a landmark on the river and one of the top attractions in the city since its construction in 2019.

Lyu said the bridge constitutes the most attractive part of the Fenhe River.

"It is especially beautiful in the evening when the lights and the rainbow arches are reflected on the clear water of the river," Lyu said.

The Fenhe scenic area has also become an attractive destination for tourists from the rest of the country.

According to the city's culture and tourism bureau, the scenic area received about 300,000 tourist visits during the five-day May Day holiday spanning from April 29 to May 3.

The city's authorities are planning for further efforts to improve the river this year, according to Hou Gang, an official at the Fenhe River scenic area's administration committee.

"We will add more cultural and public service facilities along the river," Hou said. "The most exciting news for both locals and tourists is that we are making the Fenhe a navigable river. That should lead to the revival of the famed historical attraction of 'evening ferries on Fenhe'."

The area near the Jinyang Bridge used to be a berth for boats to shuttle passengers across the river in ancient times. The business was once so prosperous that 'evening ferries on Fenhe' topped the eight famed attractions in Taiyuan.

Ding Yuan contributed to this story.

Hospital collaboration aids medical reform

By YUAN SHENGGAO

On April 27, the renowned Bethune Hospital in Taiyuan, the capital city of Shanxi province, received a group of visitors from East China's Jiangxi province.

The visitors were from the Jiangxi Xiangya Hospital. The purpose of their tour was to learn about its experience in medical reform and management.

"Like many hospitals in China, we are in the second phase of medical system reform," said Liang Bin, Party secretary of Jiangxi Xiangya. "Here we have found the experience of Bethune Hospital can be inspiring and replicable for our reforming plans."

Starting its reform in 2019, Bethune Hospital is now the leading player in Shanxi's latest round of medical system reform.

To address the public requirements for affordable, accessible and better-quality medical services, the Chinese government began to implement a reforming initiative in October 2019, calling for the establishment of regional medical hubs in a number of provinces, municipalities and autonomous regions. The regional hubs feature the pairing of leading hospitals of two provincial-level regions to share their resources to benefit the broader public.

Shanxi and Central China's Hubei province were designated as one of the pilot regions in this reform, and Bethune Hospital in Shanxi and Tongji Hospital in Hubei are the leading hospitals.

But the two hospitals reacted even earlier than the Chinese government's formal announcement.

In August 2019, the two institutions signed an agreement to build cooperative medical hubs for the two provinces. In December that year, experts from Tongji Hospital were stationed in Bethune Hospital to help to launch joint development programs.

Tongji Hospital, an affiliate to the renowned Tongji Medical College of Huazhong University of Science and Technology, is a strong force in research and management, so the partnership can bring visible benefits to Bethune Hospital, according to an executive of the Shanxi-based hospital.

Benefiting from the partnership, Bethune Hospital now ranks among the top 100 in the nation in terms of CMI, or case mix index, said the executive, adding that there are also substantial improvements in research and education.

Wu Hua, vice-president of Tongji Hospital, is now the president of Bethune Hospital. In addition to leading an expert team to help to improve the research capability of the Shanxi hospital, he said the focus of his mission is to reform the existing medical system.

"All the reforms should benefit the general public," Wu said. "That is also the target of our reform in Bethune Hospital."

He noted that China began its first medical system reform campaign in 1985, which featured

> "All the reforms should benefit the general public. That is also the target of our reform in Bethune Hospital."
>
> **Wu Hua,** president of Bethune Hospital

increasing autonomy for hospitals and operations according to market rules.

"The first reform led to the expansion of the medical service market and the accumulation of resources in bigger cities," Wu said. "But problems also arise, including the rapidly rising prices for medicines and services, and the inaccessibility of advantageous resources in smaller cities and rural areas."

Wu said now that the country is implementing a second reform to divert from the situation, Bethune Hospital's priority will be given to offering affordable, accessible and better-quality services to patients throughout the province.

"To reach this goal, we must rely on refined management to increase efficiency and cut costs; foster a competent force of medics to offer better services; and branch out to cover more patients in the province," Wu said.

One initiative is to shorten the hospitalization period of patients.

Liu Xiansheng, who is also from Tongji, is the vice-president of Bethune Hospital. He said the key to shortening the hospitalization period is scientific management.

"This is a practice closely relating to procedure management," Liu said. "It requires close collaborations among the testing, inpatient and information technology departments. New technologies like big data analysis can substantially improve efficiency and optimize procedure management."

In 2022, the average hospitalization period for patients in Bethune Hospital was 8.86 days. That was 2.72 days less than that in 2020. In the first quarter of this year, the period was further cut to 8.46 days, according to Liu.

"A shortened hospitalization period means a decrease of costs for patients," Liu said. "Patients are also benefiting from substantial decreases in medicine prices, which are a result of our accurate procurement management."

As a part of its branching-out initiative, Bethune built its first county-level subsidiary in Yonghe in April 2019. Since then, the hospital has launched cooperative programs to support 35 county-level hospitals. In addition, its 26 departments have established regional alliances, offering assistance to more than 1,000 members throughout the province.

Jia Lijun contributed to this story.

Medics from both Tongji and Bethune hospitals discuss a plan for a surgical operation of a critical patient. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Renowned *baijiu* brand's globalization boosts promotion of Chinese culture

By YUAN SHENGGAO

On April 30, the Fenjiu Experience Center in Singapore welcomed officials from the Chinese embassy in Singapore.

The center was launched in December 2021 by renowned white liquor producer Xinghuacun Fenjiu Group based in China's Shanxi province.

The officials were there to attend a networking event for the promotion of the Chinese liquor and the culture associated with this time-honored brand.

Chinese diplomats praised the role that Xinghuacun Fenjiu has played in the promotion of Chinese culture in the process of its globalization.

White liquor, or *baijiu*, is an alcoholic beverage variety unique to China. In its centuries of development, white liquor has had a deep-rooted association with culture, arts and poetry. And Xinghuacun Fenjiu is a typical example of such an association, according to an executive at the center.

The brand Xinghuacun is actually named after a poem written by Tang Dynasty (618-907) poet Du Mu. In the poem, Du described his mood during a trip on Qingming, or Tomb Sweeping Day, in April. In Chinese, Xinghuacun literally means apricot flower village.

"A drizzling rain falls like tears on the Qingming day.

The traveler's heart is going to break on the way.

Where can a liquor shop be found to drown his dismay?

A cowherd points to the apricot flower village far away."

The poem is so popular in China that almost all school children are able to recite it. This popularity has helped to make the white liquor brand Xinghuacun a household name.

History books show that the first reference of the Fenjiu brand name was made by an emperor during the Northern Qi Dynasty (550-577).

The ancient technique for the production of the white liquor, which has been observed for centuries, is now on China's national list of intangible cultural heritage.

The Chinese embassy's officials said Singapore has a large population with ancestral roots in China, so they have a better understanding of the Chinese culture embodied in the Xinghuacun Fenjiu liquor. On the other hand, Singapore is an international metropolis, which can play a crucial role in boosting Xinghuacun Fenjiu's globalization.

Xinghuacun Fenjiu is one of the pioneering *baijiu* companies of China to go global.

After it won a first prize at the Panama Pacific International Exposition in San Francisco, the United States, in 1915, Fenjiu-branded white liquor began to attract the attention of international buyers.

Since then, Xinghuacun Fenjiu brands have become popular in overseas markets. The products were first sold to Southeast Asia and East Asia and then to Europe and the Americas.

Xinghuacun Fenjiu is now among the top three exporters in China's white liquor industry. To date, its products have been sold to more than 60 countries and regions, through its 50-plus overseas dealers and more than 9,000 outlets in foreign countries.

Wu Jia contributed to this story.

WORLD

US credit put on negative watch by Fitch

Washington risks losing high ranking as debt crisis talks remain deadlocked

NEW YORK — Ratings agency Fitch put the United States' credit on watch for a possible downgrade on Wednesday, raising the stakes as talks over the country's debt ceiling go down to the wire, and adding to the jitters in global markets.

Fitch put the country's AAA rating, its highest rank, on a negative watch in a precursor to a possible downgrade should lawmakers fail to raise the amount that the Treasury can borrow before it runs out of money, which could happen as soon as next week.

Despite reaching the $31.4 trillion debt limit in January, discussions between the White House and congressional leaders only began on May 9, less than a month before the estimated date of a US government default on its debt obligations.

Negotiators for Democratic President Joe Biden and top congressional Republican Kevin McCarthy held what both sides called productive talks on Wednesday. But the White House and Republicans are still at odds with each other on multiple aspects of spending and revenues.

The White House blamed the Republicans for risking a devastating default that would hit "every single part of the country" as they demand "extreme" spending cuts that would hurt millions of citizens.

McCarthy said the debt ceiling standoff was "not my fault" as Republican negotiators and the White House failed to finish out talks. He warned they need more time to try to reach a budget-slashing deal with President Joe Biden.

On Thursday, the two sides are expected to resume negotiations.

"The Rating Watch Negative reflects increased political partisanship that is hindering reaching a resolution to raise or suspend the debt limit," the agency said in a statement.

The brinkmanship over the debt ceiling, failure of the US authorities to meaningfully tackle medium-term fiscal challenges that will lead to rising budget deficits and a growing debt burden signal downside risks to US creditworthiness, said Fitch.

Wall Street stocks fell again on Wednesday on rising anxiety over US debt ceiling talks as a critical deadline ended without an agreement. Treasury bills maturing around June 1, the so-called X-date when the government runs out of money, have been under pressure for weeks and came in for further selling.

"It's not entirely unexpected given the shambles that is the debt ceiling negotiations," said Tony Sycamore, an analyst at IG Markets in Sydney. "This is not a great sign."

"Fitch still expects a resolution to the debt limit before the X-date," the credit agency said in a report.

"However, we believe risks have risen that the debt limit will not be raised or suspended before the X-date and consequently that the government could begin to miss payments on some of its obligations."

Signal sounded

Fitch said the failure to reach a deal "would be a negative signal of the broader governance and willingness of the US to honor its obligations in a timely fashion", and would be unlikely to be consistent with the AAA rating.

A US Treasury spokesperson called the move a warning and said it underscored the need for a deal. The White House said it was "one more piece of evidence that default is not an option".

The "rating watch" indicates that there is a heightened probability of a rating change and the likely direction of such a change, and is different from a "rating outlook" which indicates the direction a rating is likely to move over a one- to two-year period.

In 2021, Fitch joined S&P Global Ratings and warned that political brinkmanship over the US debt limit could damage the country's otherwise top-notch credit rating.

Fitch also holds a negative view on US fiscal outturns, forecasting the US general government deficit to rise to 6.9 percent of GDP in 2024, up from 5.5 percent in 2022 and expected 6.5 percent in 2023.

A rising interest burden and growing spending on entitlements over the coming decade will keep US deficits above 7 percent of GDP on average, said Fitch.

In August 2011, S&P Global Ratings lowered the credit rating of long-term US government debt from AAA to AA+ amid a debt ceiling impasse at that time.

AGENCIES—XINHUA

Traders work on the trading floor of the New York Stock Exchange in New York on Wednesday. XINHUA

Speaking up

People participate in a march in New York on Wednesday, where hundreds took part in a rally protesting Mayor Eric Adams' anticipated budget plan that could result in $2.5 billion in cuts to libraries, schools and social service programs. MICHAEL M. SANTIAGO VIA AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Doubts raised over Fukushima survey

By YANG HAN in Hong Kong
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Low expectations surround the visit of South Korean experts to the crippled Fukushima nuclear power plant, even after the lead scientist admitted it is likely the team could "make progress".

Doubts over the inspection trip center on the ability to gather satisfactory results, according to experts, while South Korean critics expressed wariness over the visit being used by the Japanese to shift negative sentiment, especially over fish caught in the area surrounding the plant.

The South Korean inspection team's visit to Fukushima will find it hard to generate good results, just like the previous visit conducted by Taiwan experts last year, Yang Ki-ho, professor of Japanese studies at Sungkonghoe University in Seoul, told China Daily.

"Unfortunately, the discharge of contaminated water may not be able to be stopped," said Yang, who told local media earlier in May that Tokyo may use the visit to justify the release of the contaminated water, saying that it did its best to alleviate the concerns of the adjacent nation.

On Wednesday, a team of 21 South Korean experts completed their two-day on-site inspection of the Fukushima nuclear power plant for the dilution and discharge of radioactive wastewater, according to South Korea's Yonhap News Agency.

Led by South Korea's Nuclear Safety and Security Commission Chairperson Yoo Guk-hee, the team's six-day visit was part of an agreement reached between South Korean President Yoon Suk-yeol and Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida during their summit in Seoul on May 7.

On May 23, South Korean experts examined the Advanced Liquid Processing System, or ALPS, purification process at the plant and facilities related to the K4 tanks designed to store and conduct measurements of radioactive substances.

Noting that the team examined all the facilities they wanted to see, Yoo told reporters they will likely be able to "make progress" in terms of assessing the safety of the water.

Criticism aired

The team was not able to independently collect water samples but was analyzing those collected earlier by the International Atomic Energy Agency, or IAEA. The IAEA is expected to issue a final report on Japan's water release plan in late June.

In 2011, a massive earthquake and subsequent tsunami destroyed the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant's cooling systems. The plant currently stores over 1.3 million tons of water treated using ALPS. Japan plans to begin releasing that water as early as this summer, with the process set to last decades.

Critics in South Korea said the visit might be used to shift negative sentiment on the possible contamination of seafood products from Fukushima.

Though South Korea said it will not consider lifting its import ban on seafood from Fukushima even if the water discharge plan is evaluated as safe, Presidential Chief of Staff Kim Dae-ki said on May 24 that South Korea's fisheries products exhibited no problems even directly after the Fukushima accident when substances more radioactive than the contaminated water went out into the sea.

By using this logic, the government has lost the justification to stop the wastewater release plan, said Park Seong-jun, spokesperson for the main opposition Democratic Party, or DP.

The DP proposed on May 24 that the National Assembly adopt a resolution opposing Japan's plan to discharge radioactive water from the Fukushima plant.

South Koreans are very concerned about the visit because the information on what they actually did is not released to the outside, said Lee Seok-woo, a professor at the Inha University Law School. More time should be given to evaluate the safety of nuclear wastewater, Lee said.

Briefly

JAPAN

Masked man with rifle and knife kills three

Three people including two police officers were killed in Nagano Prefecture in central Japan on Thursday, and a suspect with a rifle and knife was holed up inside a building, according to police and media reports. A witness told NHK public television that a woman fell while being chased by the suspect, who then stabbed her with a knife and shot at two police officers as they arrived at the scene in Nakano city. Police described the suspect as a man wearing a camouflage outfit, a hat, a mask and sunglasses, Kyodo News said. City officials urged those in the area to stay home.

AUSTRALIA

Firefighters contain massive Sydney blaze

A massive blaze gutted an abandoned hat factory in central Sydney and forced emergency services to evacuate people from nearby apartment buildings before firefighters brought the inferno under control, without any casualties reported. Over 30 firetrucks and 130 firefighters fought the fire in the seven-story building close to Sydney's central railway station on Thursday afternoon, officials said. Shortly after the blaze erupted, flames almost as high as the building itself could be seen shooting into the sky. Burning embers were also swept onto a balcony in a nearby building, television footage showed.

CANADA

Ottawa and Riyadh restore full relations

Canada and Saudi Arabia have decided to restore diplomatic relations and appoint new ambassadors, Global Affairs Canada, which manages the country's diplomatic and consular relations, said in a statement on Wednesday. "Canada has appointed a new ambassador to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Jean-Philippe Linteau," said the statement, saying the move was based on mutual respect and common interests. Saudi Arabia's foreign ministry made a similar announcement on Wednesday. In 2018, Saudi Arabia expelled the Canadian ambassador after a diplomatic dispute.

AGENCIES—XINHUA

After ties reset with Bahrain, Lebanon eyes recovery

By JAN YUMUL in Hong Kong
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Crisis-hit Lebanon's recent reconciliation with Bahrain amid a flurry of regional relations' reset could open more channels for dialogue, as the country charts its way out of an economic and political impasse, analysts said.

The two countries' decision to restore full diplomatic relations on May 20 ends more than a row that started in October 2021 after former Lebanese information minister George Kordahi criticized Saudi Arabia's role in the costly Yemeni war. Saudi and other Gulf countries recalled their diplomats over the incident. Kordahi resigned in December 2021.

Lebanon has also been without a president since October last year after former president Michel Aoun completed his term. Legislators are unable to agree on electing the next head of state, delaying much-needed reforms, including a key to unlocking a $3 billion funding bailout from the International Monetary Fund.

Currently, the country is led by caretaker Prime Minister Najib Mikati, who said on May 20 that his country appreciated and welcomed Bahrain's decision to resume ties.

Deniz Istikbal, an economics researcher at the Foundation for Political, Economic and Social Research, a think tank in Ankara, Turkiye, noted that the reconciliation between Lebanon and Bahrain "is not independent of regional developments".

"Lebanon is in a huge economic crisis. One of the main reasons for this crisis is relations with the countries of the region."

Istikbal added that better ties with Bahrain may also open channels of dialogue for Beirut with other regional countries.

"In addition, the normalization of diplomatic relations may lead to an increase in aid and investments. Bahrain's sovereign wealth fund is important in this sense … The IMF cannot find a solution to Lebanon's economic crisis. Regional support can alleviate the economic crisis," he added.

Regional support for Lebanon may come from the Gulf Cooperation Council. The GCC constitutes around 50 percent of Lebanon's export markets, the Arabian Business news quoted Paul Abi Nasr, CEO of Polytextile and board member of the Association of Lebanese Industrialists, as saying in 2021. Around $250 million worth of imports were reportedly affected when Saudi Arabia banned Lebanese imports.

The recently concluded 32nd Arab League Summit in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, on May 19 — which also saw the participation of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad in his first regional summit since the outbreak of the Syrian civil war in 2011 — had issued a declaration expressing solidarity with Lebanon.

'Calm environment'

The Jeddah Declaration also urged all Lebanese parties to engage in dialogue in order to elect a president "who fulfills the aspirations of the Lebanese people", the regular work of the constitutional institutions, and "the adoption of the required reforms to get Lebanon out of its crisis".

Anis Khayati, an economics professor at the College of Business Administration at the University of Bahrain, told China Daily that Bahrain's resumption of diplomatic relations with Lebanon "comes in the context of the calm environment in the region that accompanied the China-brokered Saudi-Iranian agreement".

He said the return of relations indicates the role that Iran, which has a Shia majority, and its allies might play in reducing tensions with Bahrain. The resumption of diplomatic relations may also be part of a prior arrangement that falls within the general framework of the Saudi-Iranian agreement.

"This makes Hezbollah currently the strongest component of the Lebanese state," he said. Hezbollah, a Shia Muslim political and military outfit, wields significant influence in Lebanon. It opposes Western meddling and Israel's operations in the Middle East.

In his speech at the Arab League Summit, Lebanon's Mikati described it as the "healing wounds" summit, following the Saudi-Iran detente and Syria's return to the Arab fold, Lebanon's National News Agency reported.

"With the improvement of regional relations, the crisis can be overcome," said Istikbal from Turkiye.

Display screen giant wows audience at LA event

By YUHAO ZHANG in Los Angeles
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At the SID Display Week 2023 in Los Angeles, one Chinese company brought along its new products to wow the crowd this week.

BOE Technology Group, a world leader in the semiconductor display industry, showcased these products at the exhibition, which included a 110-inch 16K UHD display screen, a foldable laptop with the fastest refresh rate at 600Hz, and a smart cockpit.

"It's a very nice panel. It's big, and it's almost impossible to see the pixels; that's really nice," said Erwin Bellers, who works for Roku, as he viewed BOE's 16K UHD display.

Based in Beijing, BOE products also feature a realistic wood texture display that can blend well with the interior of an auto.

"The one with the piece of wood," said Daniel Fischer, a UX/UI designer at BMW, on what impressed him the most.

His colleague Olivier Pitrat added, "We know that BOE is one of the biggest Chinese OEMs doing displays in mass production. So, we are curious to see all the inventions."

Data from global market research agency Omdia showed that BOE ranked first in the world for LCD screen shipments last year in five major application sectors: smartphones, tablets, laptops, monitors and TVs.

Yanshun Chen, chairman of BOE, said China's share of global semiconductor display capacity has risen from zero to 60 percent now, and BOE is supplying 1 in every 4 displays in the world.

By 2022, BOE had filed more than 80,000 independent patent applications. Among the new annual patent applications, over 90 percent are for invention, and more than 33 percent are for overseas, covering countries and regions including the United States, Japan, South Korea and Europe.

"We understand that in the industry, only cooperation leads to a win-win situation," Chen said. "We need to work with partners to promote the development of display technology."

BOE Technology Group, a world leader in the semiconductor display industry, showcases its products at the SID Display Week 2023 in Los Angeles on Tuesday. YUHAO ZHANG / CHINA DAILY

WORLD

DeSantis jumps into fray amid Twitter glitch

Rivalry with Trump builds up as Florida governor enters 2024 White House race

By AI HEPING in New York
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Florida Governor Ron DeSantis finally put himself in the race for the Republican presidential nomination, setting up what is expected to be a bruising primary season with former president Donald Trump.

DeSantis, 44, filed with the Federal Election Commission on Wednesday to run for president ahead of a live Twitter conversation with owner Elon Musk before his campaign released an official launch video.

But the planned conversation early on Wednesday evening encountered multiple technical issues that delayed it by more than 20 minutes as the platform kept crashing.

Musk blamed the technical difficulties on servers not having sufficient bandwidth for the hundreds of thousands of people tuning in.

"I think we're definitely breaking new ground here," Musk said. "As far as I know, no major presidential candidate has ever announced their candidacy on social media this way, certainly in a Twitter Space. So, thank you for doing that."

DeSantis said he chose to announce via the social media platform because of his distrust of the media after its coverage of his response to the pandemic. He praised Musk for purchasing the social media company.

"I think what was done with Twitter is really significant for the future of our country. We cannot have a society in which the government is colluding with major tech platforms to enforce an orthodoxy."

A spokesman for DeSantis told CBS News: "There is so much enthusiasm for Governor DeSantis' vision for our Great American Comeback that he literally busted up the internet. Washington is next."

Ron DeSantis

During the discussion, DeSantis singled out national crime rates and highlighted energy independence as well as the rise in migrants at the US-Mexico border.

"To voters who are participating in this primary process, my pledge to you is this: If you nominate me, you can set your clock to January 20, 2025, at high noon, because on the west side of the US Capitol I will be taking the oath of office as the 47th president of the United States. No excuses. I will get the job done."

Competitors' reaction

When DeSantis was experiencing Twitter difficulties, Trump wrote on his Truth Social post: "Wow! The DeSanctus TWITTER launch is a DISASTER! His whole campaign will be a disaster. WATCH."

President Joe Biden tweeted, "This link works," with a link to donate to his own campaign.

DeSantis has consistently ranked second behind Trump in nationwide polls of Republicans. Trump once endorsed DeSantis for Florida governor, but after expecting DeSantis to enter the primary race, he has attacked him for months.

The former president is the first choice of 53 percent of Republican and Republican-leaning voters in the primary, roughly doubling DeSantis' 26 percent, according to a CNN poll released on Wednesday and conducted by SSRS, a research company in Pennsylvania.

But the survey also found that wide swaths of Republican-aligned voters are willing to consider either of the two.

Earlier on Wednesday, Trump attacked DeSantis on social media, calling him disloyal for running and pointing out votes DeSantis made as a congressman in favor of resolutions that would, among other things, raise the retirement age for Social Security. DeSantis has distanced himself from that recently.

"Also, he desperately needs a personality transplant, and, to the best of my knowledge, they are not medically available yet," Trump wrote.

A March CNN survey had Trump at 40 percent and DeSantis at 36 percent. When voters in the new poll were asked about a second choice, however, DeSantis got 34 percent and Trump 15 percent.

Trump was banned from Twitter after the Jan 6, 2021, insurrection by his supporters at the Capitol, and he has yet to return to the site even after Musk reinstated him in the fall.

"Announcing on Twitter is perfect for Ron DeSantis," a Trump adviser told NBC News. "This way he doesn't have to interact with people and the media can't ask him any questions."

DeSantis said he can win the general election against Biden, 80, while Trump, 76, cannot. Trump has targeted DeSantis, using personal attacks and disparaging nicknames.

Prior to officially entering the race, DeSantis had taken trips to early voting states such as Iowa, New Hampshire and Nevada.

The challenge he faces other than trailing widely in polls is to convert Trump supporters without alienating them.

Agencies contributed to this story.

'Printing' school

An operator works at the site of the first school being constructed using concrete 3D printing technology in the western Ukrainian city of Lviv on Wednesday. YURIY DYACHYSHYN / AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

China, Ethiopia to enhance bilateral ties

By ZHOU JIN
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China expressed its support to the peace process in Ethiopia on Thursday, saying it stands ready to enhance bilateral cooperation to facilitate postwar reconstruction and development in the Horn of Africa country.

State Councilor and Foreign Minister Qin Gang made the remarks when meeting with Ethiopia's Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Demeke Mekonnen Hassen, who is on an official visit to China from Wednesday to Sunday.

The two ministers last met during Qin's visit to the Ethiopian capital Addis Ababa, as part of his first African tour in January since he became China's foreign minister.

Qin said Beijing would like to strengthen coordination with Addis Ababa to implement the China-proposed Outlook on Peace and Development in the Horn of Africa, supporting countries in the region to seek strength through unity and achieve prosperity and stability.

Ethiopia has seen a devastating conflict between government-allied troops and forces loyal to the Tigray People's Liberation Front since November 2020.

In November, the Ethiopian government and the TPLF agreed to end the two-year brutal war in northern Ethiopia under African Union-led mediation efforts in South Africa.

Ethiopia is at a crucial period to consolidate peace and focus on development, Qin said.

China has delivered two batches of emergency food supplies to countries in the Horn of Africa, and is considering providing a new batch of supplies to meet their pressing needs, he said.

Qin also expressed gratitude to the Ethiopian government for providing support and assistance to China in evacuating Chinese nationals from Sudan after conflict broke out on April 15, and in rescuing Chinese nationals robbed and detained in Ethiopia.

China hopes the Ethiopian government would take concrete and effective measures to protect the safety and legitimate rights and interests of Chinese institutions and personnel in the country, he said.

Calling Africa a priority in China's diplomacy, Qin called on the two sides to continue to work together to strengthen solidarity, friendship and seek common development.

Cooperation with China has brought tangible benefits to people from both countries and set a good example of South-South cooperation, said Mekonnen, adding that Ethiopia is willing to make plans for bilateral cooperation in the future.

He also said Ethiopia attaches great importance to improving its domestic security situation and will continue to do its utmost to ensure the safety of Chinese institutions and personnel in his country.

HIGHER GROUND

Coach to open more stores in China

By **ZHONG NAN**
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A view of Coach's booth during an expo in Haikou, Hainan province. ZHANG WEI / CHINA DAILY

Coach New York, a US-based fashion brand that specializes in leather handbags, luggage and accessories, will open 12 more outlets across China this year, its top executive said, as the country boosts policy support to increase consumer spending and unleash purchasing power.

The New York-based company will keep pace with China's rapidly changing retail environment and attract more young shoppers, especially Gen Z consumers, via various brand promotion channels, said Todd Kahn, CEO and president of Coach New York.

Gen Z refers to people born between the mid-1990s and the early 2010s.

Coach, a main brand of US multinational luxury fashion group Tapestry Inc, had 280 stores across China by the end of 2022, and opened 13 outlets in cities such as Jiaxing, Zhejiang province and Dandong, Liaoning province from January to April. It will open a further 12 stores in other cities this year.

In addition to deploying more resources on online and digital-related sales channels, such as video-sharing platform Douyin and Bilibili, Kahn said the company will continue to participate in key international trade fairs, including the China International Import Expo and China International Consumer Products Expo, to drive brand awareness and support the country's efforts to promote foreign trade and attract global capital.

He said Coach has seen a notable improvement in store traffic in China since the beginning of 2023 and its sales have soared 20 percent year-on-year in the third quarter of its 2023 fiscal year.

"In the meantime, we have started to see an uptick in the domestic travel market, including significant gains in our businesses in the Hong Kong and Macao special administrative regions, as well as a pickup in the Hainan Free Trade Port," he said.

Eager to expand its market presence in the Hainan FTP, Tapestry Inc launched its China travel retail headquarters in Hainan last year, marking an important milestone for its travel retail business in the country. Coach currently runs six duty free stores and three retail stores in Hainan.

"Looking ahead, Tapestry has an ambitious plan to open another 10 new retail and duty-free stores in China in the next three years and increase our retail sales, including tax-free business," he said. "We look forward to working with more local partners to better respond to Chinese consumer demand."

China stands out among emerging markets as a behemoth with immense potential for growth in the luxury goods market. One of the key factors contributing to this is the country's significant population of middle- and high-income consumers, which is projected to double in size by 2030, according to Bain & Company, a Boston, Massachusetts-based consultancy.

Boosted by these factors, China's retail sales of consumer goods — a major gauge of consumption — grew 8.5 percent year-on-year to top 14.98 trillion yuan ($2.16 trillion) in the first four months of this year. The growth in this category surged 18.4 percent on a yearly basis to 3.49 trillion yuan in April alone, data from the National Bureau of Statistics showed.

According to Kahn, Chinese consumers are displaying rapid changes in their shopping habits, preferences, and brand discovery methods. These purchasing behaviors require companies to maintain proximity to their customers in order to adapt swiftly.

With China expanding many programs to attract foreign investment, boost market confidence and reinforce its position in the global supply chain, multinational companies will have a greater incentive to relocate their innovation and production centers to China to be closer to consumers who are at the forefront of technology adoption, demographic changes and new purchasing behaviors, said Guo Xin, a marketing professor at Beijing Technology and Business University.

Derivatives' globalization gathers pace

Overseas investors to benefit from product portfolio expansion of futures

By **SHI JING** in Shanghai
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China will sustain efforts to internationalize its derivatives market, which helps in supply chain stability and high-quality economic growth, officials and industry experts said at an industry event on Thursday.

The country will continue to expand the futures product portfolio that foreign investors can access, said Fang Xinghai, vice-chairman of the China Securities Regulatory Commission, the top securities watchdog, during a keynote speech at the 20th Shanghai Derivatives Market Forum, which will conclude on Friday.

This will help overseas institutions better participate in the trading of primary products, further facilitating their pricing and providing more accurate price references to enterprises, Fang said.

A total of 23 designated futures products are now open to overseas investors, with 96 percent of these designed based on primary goods. Up to 39 commodities futures and options products have been made available to qualified foreign institutional investors and renminbi qualified foreign institutional investors, and 70 percent of these products are based on primary commodities, he said.

Prices have remained stable in China so far this year, thanks to the recovery in economic growth and market expectations. But the rising risks from global deflation, volatility in the international financial market and continued geopolitical tensions have posed challenges for the global industrial chain, Fang said.

Primary products, which are at the forefront of industrial and supply chains, serve as the cornerstone of the economy. Therefore, their stable supply and prices are highly important to economic stability and national security. The forward prices, based on different maturity dates, can make it easier for companies to arrange their production schedules and sale of primary goods, he said.

He Qingwen, chairman of the China Financial Futures Exchange, said at the forum that the continued opening-up of financial futures can better meet the risk management demand of overseas investors, which has come under the spotlight in recent years due to rising volatility in the stock and bond markets.

The Bond Connect program which started in July 2017, for example, can help overseas institutions improve their capabilities in pricing and spot goods management. While institutions can control risks more effectively and enhance their business connectivity, renminbi assets will become more attractive globally under the mechanism, he said.

Internationalization is also one of the seven major measures that the Shanghai Futures Exchange will adopt in the next few years, according to the exchange's strategic plan for 2023 to 2025 that was released at the forum on Thursday.

International products such as crude oil, copper and rubber should be more influential and find greater traction in the global market by 2025, which will help better serve the real economy, according to the plan.

Meanwhile, the exchange will roll out more international products, advance the internationalization of existing products and strengthen cross-border cooperation to attract more investors from across the world, the plan has outlined.

Ever since the SHFE launched yuan-denominated crude oil futures in March 2018, the first international product providing direct access to international investors, it has rolled out five similar products over time. A further 11 futures and options products have been made available to QFIIs.

"Promoting systematic opening-up is crucial as China aims to improve the core competitiveness and international influence of its futures market. Efforts should be made to strengthen the exchange and connection with global industrial chains so that the Chinese futures market will be more attractive at the global level," said SHFE Chairman Tian Xiangyang.

'Broad' scope for Sino-Swedish biz ties

By **FAN FEIFEI**
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Shoppers examine toys at an Ikea store in Kunming, Yunnan province. LIU RANYANG / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

The prospects for economic and trade cooperation between China and Sweden are broad, said Ludvig Nilsson, chairman of the Swedish Chamber of Commerce in China, with sustainable development forming one big business opportunity for Swedish enterprises that operate in the country.

Nilsson said Swedish companies that have been in China for many years have demonstrated their long-term and unswerving commitment to the Chinese market, and are upbeat about the country's growth potential.

"As long as the economy is growing, there will be more demand for high-quality products and services, and there will be opportunities for Swedish companies," Nilsson said, adding that he has full confidence in China's economic development.

The investments by Swedish companies in China, he said, have expanded from infrastructure in the past to more diversified fields, including consumer goods, fashion and environmental protection.

"A lot of our companies have very strong solutions for manufacturing in a sustainable fashion or consumption in a sustainable fashion … China also has a lot of policies to become more sustainable," he said. Therefore, Swedish companies could make use of such opportunities.

China is playing an irreplaceable role in global industrial and supply chains, Nilsson said, adding the biggest and core advantages of China's manufacturing lies in its complete industrial chains.

China is Sweden's biggest trading partner in Asia. A number of Swedish enterprises, such as Volvo, Ericsson and Ikea, have expanded their presence in the world's second-largest economy in the past decades.

Swedish truck and bus maker Scania kicked off construction of its production facility and a manufacturing base in Rugao, Jiangsu province in June 2022. The project is the company's largest overseas investment in nearly 60 years.

Mats Harborn, co-founder of the SwedCham China and president of Scania China Group, said China and Sweden are complementary, especially in terms of economy and technology. "The strengths of Swedish companies lie in the sustainable, environmentally friendly and efficient technologies, while China has gained an upper hand in digitalization, which is obviously a new trend," he said.

Harborn said the two countries have extensive cooperation opportunities in many fields, such as new energy, healthcare, architecture design, urban planning, transportation, logistics and culture.

This year marks the 25th anniversary of the establishment of the Swedish Chamber of Commerce in China. Nilsson said SwedCham China, which currently has 240 member companies, hopes to help its members better understand the business environment in China, provide a platform that promotes exchanges and mutual learning with other companies, and hold a series of activities like trainings and seminars.

Analysts said China and Sweden should expand economic and trade cooperation based on their effective and mutually beneficial trade and investment practices, to inject more growth momentum into both sides as well as the world economy.

Data from the Ministry of Commerce showed that foreign direct investment in the Chinese mainland, in terms of actual use, expanded 2.2 percent year-on-year to 499.46 billion yuan ($70.8 billion) in the first four months of the year. The manufacturing industry saw FDI inflow increase 4.1 percent year-on-year to 130.05 billion yuan during the January-April period, the ministry said.

The implementation of a new round of opening-up measures, such as the Foreign Investment Law, shortened negative list for market entry and pilot free trade zones have created favorable conditions for foreign businesses to invest in China, said Zhang Jianping, head of the center for regional economic cooperation at the Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation.

Sang Baichuan, dean of the Institute of International Economy at the University of International Business and Economics, said he expected to see greater efforts in further opening up the services sector and encouraging foreign investors to invest in both the coastal areas and central and western regions, especially in labor-intensive industries to stabilize FDI growth.

Briefly

Clean energy capacity rises in Jan-Apr

China's newly installed capacity of clean energy increased steadily in the first four months of 2023, as the country stepped up efforts to ensure sufficient energy supply and cut emissions. Newly installed capacity of wind and photovoltaic power reached 62.51 million kW from January to April, data from the National Energy Administration showed on Thursday.

Tech firm opens new factory in Bangladesh

Transsion Holdings, a China-based smartphone manufacturer, inaugurated its ISMARTU factory in Bangladesh on Wednesday to meet the growing demand for smart devices there. ISMARTU Technology BD Ltd, a subsidiary of Transsion Holdings, represents popular smart brands such as TECNO, Itel, Infinix, oraimo and Syinix. The new factory, located in the Meghna Industrial Economic Zone, Narayanganj, has a total investment of $22 million in the first phase of construction and covers an area of over 22,000 square meters. It is equipped with the latest technology and adheres to high international standards of quality and safety.

XINHUA — CHINA DAILY

Price cuts find favor among e-platforms

By **ZHU WENQIAN**
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China's major e-commerce platforms have begun presales for the annual June 18 shopping carnival online, with direct price cuts being a preferred strategy.

The promotional event is expected to drive consumption growth in the second quarter, experts said.

Domestic e-commerce platforms have already increased investment and effort to promote the shopping event.

Online retailers JD and Vipshop have started presales this week, while Taobao and Tmall will begin their presales from Friday, the experts said.

A record high number of merchants are expected to participate in JD's promotional event this year.

Earlier this year, global luxury brands such as Tiffany & Co and Bottega Veneta, as well as new energy vehicles maker Tesla, launched their online stores on JD, and they will join the June 18 event.

According to JD, apart from direct price reduction of products, consumers will stand to gain three coupons every day. Each of these coupons will reduce prices by 20 yuan if they buy products worth more than 200 yuan, barring some exceptions.

"This year, JD has issued more subsidies for the June 18 shopping festival compared with previous years, and we will launch more products and provide easier and more convenient shopping experiences for consumers," said Xin Lijun, CEO of JD retail, the retail unit of JD.

Taobao and Tmall, both e-commerce platforms of the Alibaba Group, said they will invest the highest amounts on record this year and help merchants attract a huge number of customers for the June 18 event. In March, both these e-commerce platforms saw strong revenue growth in the clothing and health products categories, according to the financial report of Alibaba Group.

Meanwhile, online retailer Vipshop said it will directly reduce prices of various products, and consumers would not have to buy several products at the same time to reach a certain value and get discounts. The platform will also select some 100 bestselling products daily during the period around June 18 and offer more discounts on those products.

The e-commerce unit of short-video platform Douyin also said it would adopt a strategy of cross-store purchasing discounts and reduce 25 yuan on each purchase worth 150 yuan, besides launching presale events. Douyin said the platform will help drive huge traffic for June 18.

"This year, e-commerce platforms have launched greater promotional events and given more subsidies directly, and their promotional methods have become simpler. Buyers don't have to calculate the prices and combine multiple orders to get the discounts," said Mo Daiqing, a senior analyst at domestic consultancy Internet Economy Institute.

"In addition, livestreaming sessions remain a key part of this year's June 18 shopping festival. Short-video platforms such as Douyin and Kuaishou have increased subsidies and aim to attract more traffic to compete with e-commerce shopping platforms," Mo said.

BUSINESS

Actuaries body hails eased grip over ownership

SOA: Relaxed measures to enhance operating flexibility, drive innovation

By SHI JING
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China's huge market size, the ongoing maturity of the insurance industry and the relaxed grip on foreign ownership all point to more room for the development of foreign insurance companies' operations in the country, said Andrew Peterson, managing director of the international department at the Society of Actuaries.

Peterson made the comments during his first visit to China in three years to attend the SOA China Symposium held in Shanghai in mid-May.

Relaxed measures regarding ownership of foreign insurance companies will allow more flexibility in how foreign insurance companies operate in the Chinese market, he said. While competition will intensify, it will also drive innovation, providing more choices to consumers.

Since early 2020, the limit on foreign ownership of life insurance companies has been completely removed. Foreign ownership limits on insurance companies' asset management firms were completely lifted in August last year.

Based on experiences in other markets, the relaxed grip on ownership may drive consolidation in the Chinese insurance industry. In other words, international insurers may acquire local companies to further facilitate the former's operation in the Chinese market, added Peterson.

China's rollout of the personal pension scheme late last year also indicates growth opportunities for foreign insurance companies, as it is the field where these companies have much strength, according to Peterson. But products should be adapted to local demand, he noted.

In mid-January 2020, Germany-based Allianz set up the first wholly owned foreign insurance holding company in China. Industry giant AIA Group was approved to set up the first wholly owned foreign life insurance company in China in June 2020.

According to the China Banking and Insurance Regulatory Commission, which has been incorporated into the National Administration of Financial Regulation, up to 68 foreign insurance firms and 79 representative offices of overseas insurance institutions have been operating in China since the end of 2022. The total assets of foreign insurers amounted to 2.26 trillion yuan ($319.6 billion) by the end of last year, up 552 percent from 10 years ago.

The digital transformation within the Chinese insurance industry over the past few years has also been quite noticeable, Peterson said.

China Reinsurance updated in July its catastrophe model for typhoons by integrating engineering and financial statistics. Shanghai-based Zhong An Insurance teamed up with online consultation platform Alibaba Health and rolled out in June a chronic disease insurance product for diabetic patients. All these are based on the integration with digital platforms or state-of-art technologies, such as predictive analytics, data science or artificial intelligence, he said.

Peterson said people have become more aware of the importance of insurance due to the COVID-19, which is not only true in China but also worldwide.

In addition, people come to understand that tail effects from extreme events with low probability may have significant impacts when they do happen, he added. Actuaries are important under such circumstances to educate industries and governments on the importance of risk management.

Meanwhile, actuaries should help price products more appropriately in such extreme events, making products affordable and preventing insurance companies from bankruptcy due to erroneous pricing, he said.

Actuaries analyze the financial costs of risk and uncertainty using math, statistics and financial theory to assess the risk of potential events to help businesses and clients develop policies that minimize risk costs. Actuaries' work is essential to the insurance industry.

Founded in 1889, the SOA is the world's largest professional institution for actuaries, serving more than 32,000 members as of December 2022. The number of SOA members has risen 50 percent over the past five years to 1,400 in China.

Describing actuaries as a "small profession", Peterson estimated that there may be 100,000 actuaries around the world. In the Chinese market, the demand for such talents will be greater than supply in the short term, he added.

Visitors check out a Hongqi electric vehicle during an auto show in Stockholm, Sweden, in February.
WEI XUECHAO / XINHUA

Polish expert calls for stronger ties with Chinese players in batteries

WARSAW — A Polish expert said that he would see China, which accounts for 77 percent of the global battery cells output, as a partner rather than a competitor for Poland in this field.

Poland has overtaken the United States with the world's second-largest lithium-ion battery production capacity, behind only China, according to a report published last month by the Polish Alternative Fuels Association (PSPA).

"I think the European and Polish e-mobility value chain is pursuing partnerships in all areas. So, wherever there is a technological partnership, and a partnership that leads to zero emission transport, then it's definitely on the table," said Aleksander Rajch, a board member of the PSPA, told Xinhua News Agency in a recent interview.

Rajch said that he attributes China's success in the automotive battery industry to its big internal market, technological competitiveness and access to resources.

"China holds huge access to deposits of lithium and other critical raw materials. So, China is self-sustaining. It has a huge market and huge potential," he said. "The Chinese lithium-ion battery companies are coming to Europe, so the innovation is coming to Europe as well."

Rajch, also the external affairs director of the PSPA, Poland's largest NGO promoting e-mobility, said that in addition to good economic conditions and low costs for starting businesses, Poland also has a "skilled workforce and proximity to the largest automotive market in the European Union, the German market."

Poland produces e-buses, components for charging infrastructure, software solutions, and lithium-ion batteries. "It's a very good value chain," Rajch said.

Poland's production capacity rose to 73 gigawatt-hours, or 6 percent of the world's total in 2022, according to the report. The value of exports in the battery sector increased 38-fold over the last six years from around 1 billion zloty ($240 million) in 2017 to 38.6 billion zloty in 2022, according to the Central Statistical Office of Poland.

Noting that the electric vehicles industry has been growing exponentially in China in recent years, Rajch said he expects more Chinese EVs on the roads in Europe.

"With this new technology — electric mobility and everything that it entails — China is coming in as a very big and equal, if not dominating, contender to this (domain)," he said.

"The market will change, and roads will change ... There'll be more mixed offers in Europe," Rajch said.

XINHUA

Blueprints matter

Engineers of China Railway 24th Bureau Group Corp Ltd check blueprints at the construction site of the second bid of Jinhua-Jiande High-speed Railway in Zhejiang province on Wednesday. The State contractor said the beam yard for the second bid is now at full speed building box girders, with the first one prefabricated on Wednesday. Connecting the three Zhejiang cities of Jinhua, Lanxi and Jiande with China's major railway network, the 64.5-kilometer high-speed railway aims to further develop tourist attractions along the route and provide a faster link between Zhejiang and inland provinces.
PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Nation key market for Australian wool firms

CANBERRA — Australia's wool industry has welcomed increased demand in the Chinese market, the head of an Australian wool enterprise said.

John Roberts, chief executive of Australian Wool Innovation, has returned to Australia after "a productive week" in China, meeting senior industry figures in Shanghai, Nanjing and Zhangjiagang in Jiangsu province, Tongxiang in Zhejiang province and Beijing.

Roberts said that increased demand for wool and a growing appetite for locally made brands in the Chinese market are expected to drive an increase in the amount exported from Australia to China.

Roberts said it was important to go to China for the first time in almost four years because throughout COVID-19, the partners were still able to support Australian wool growers and the domestic trade more broadly.

"And it was important to get up there and acknowledge that and thank the Chinese processing sector on behalf of our stakeholders," the CEO said in a recent statement to the media.

There is an underlying confidence in China and a quiet determination to expand in China, he added.

According to Roberts, Chinese consumers are buying local brands and designers, a massive shift from 10 to 15 years ago.

The chief executive said there have been major changes in both consumer and industry attitudes on environmental issues as well.

"There has been a massive shift toward traceability because there's been so much online buying, but the concept of sustainability in China has escalated at a rate I hadn't quite expected," he said.

"Every plant I went to has been updating, and I've never seen so many solar panels, and they weren't there four years ago. Overall, the expansion in plant capacity is incredible," Roberts added.

AWI is a not-for-profit enterprise that conducts research and development, and marketing along the worldwide supply chain of Australian wool to increase the long-term profitability of woolgrowers.

"Our trade-to-trade relationship is rock solid and always has been," Roberts said.

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BUSINESS FOCUS

Guiyang brings intelligent digitalization to agriculture

Farms incorporate big data to grow produce, raise livestock, leading to better food safety

By **YANG JUN** in Guiyang and **CHEN MEILING** in Beijing

In Guiyang, Guizhou province, a hub for big data development in China, even a kiwi fruit "knows" what digital life means.

At the kiwi technology garden in Guiyang's Xiuwen county, a big screen shows real-time images of kiwi orchards in 10 villages or towns, as well as updates on the temperature, humidity, rainfall, plant diseases and insects.

Each orchard has a special page recording its basic information such as planting area, the number of trees, the average age of trees, annual harvest, and use of fertilizers and pesticides, according to Jin Yi, who is in charge of the e-commerce department of Xiuwen Guotou Group.

The platform also draws graphics based on annual sales statistics and conducts data analysis.

"From the results, we know the taste and sugar degree demand of customers in different cities. For example, the northern markets prefer sweeter kiwis than southern ones, which can help us sell in a more scientific and precise way," Jin said.

In addition, each kiwi is given an "identification card", so that customers can scan the QR code to learn about the orchard, use of fertilizers, picking time and sales regions, to realize traceable information to secure food quality.

Kiwi fruit in Xiuwen is given the nickname "seven is not enough", which means, "You will not be satisfied even though you eat seven kiwis at a time". "Seven" sounds like "eat" in the local dialect.

From planting, growing and selling to after-sales service, big data is adopted in the whole industrial chain of the kiwi fruits, setting a good example of modern, intelligent agriculture.

In recent years, Guiyang has combined big data with agriculture to reduce human labor, expand production scale, improve market competition and infuse vitality into traditional agriculture, experts said.

At a vegetable greenhouse in Kaiyang county, a worker changes the environmental conditions just by operating an app.

"A few months ago, it beeped at night. We could not get to the greenhouses on time so we closed the awnings through the app to protect the vegetables. It's much more convenient now," said Cen Cong, a worker at the base.

The app, developed by Guiyang Agricultural Investment Group, was put into operation in late 2022 to manage more than 10 vegetable plantations in Guiyang. Temperature, humidity, sunlight and other elements in the greenhouses can be controlled remotely.

Cen added that the real-time conditions of the greenhouses would be updated so that the company can better formulate planting strategies. In the future, the plantations of the company will use this app to improve production efficiency and realize fine management. Another app is used to assign tasks to farm workers of the company.

The group focuses on the cultivation of peppers, strawberries and morels as well as raising pigs, sturgeons and perches.

Besides the app, a major vegetable seedling and breeding center in the county has adopted advanced technologies in the whole process — automatic seed sowing, intelligent pre-germination, automatic irrigation systems and a grafting production line — making it the most advanced seedling center in the province.

"Industrialized seedling production, compared with traditional methods, has obvious advantages. It saves human labor, cuts the growth period by five to 10 days and reduces the use of fertilizers and pesticides," said Chen Fucai, technical director of Guizhou Modern Seed Industry Group Co Ltd, a subsidiary of Guiyang Agricultural Investment Group. "Two or three workers can manage a 4,000-square-meter seedling region."

The center mainly deals with pepper, tomato, kale, broccoli and eggplant seedlings. It's expected to produce about 85 million seedlings annually.

Intelligent agriculture has also expanded in animal husbandry.

Wan Kaichun, a broiler chicken breeder in Xifeng county, checks the condition of his chick house through a television or telephone with an app. He gets an alert if anything, such as the temperature, is abnormal. With devices and conveyor belts, he can feed the chickens quickly and precisely.

Wan said he can manage the family's 20,000 chickens all by himself with the help of the platform.

A series of digital and intelligent products being used in the agricultural field have promoted the modernization and rural vitalization of Guiyang.

By collecting and analyzing massive data, the growth conditions of crops and livestock can be acquired, so that better planting and raising methods can be offered, not only to improve production and quality on the supply end, but also to provide safer food on the market end.

As Guiyang is working to build a national food safety demonstration city, big data is adopted in food production, processing, circulation and consumption to realize whole-chain traceable monitoring.

At the Guiyang agricultural products logistics park, fresh foods are given a QR code that contains all the information customers may want to know.

"We will record the time when it enters the park, its place of origin, certificates, inspection and when and where it leaves the park, and report to the commerce and market supervision departments," said Li Qingqing, the park's business planning manager.

At the Xinlukou farmer's market in Nanming district, a big screen shows pesticide residue inspection data. Customers can check a machine to obtain information about the traders and food. Similar screens can be found at some snack streets to answer any worries about street food safety.

The Guiyang campus intelligent catering governance platform records surveillance video images from the kitchens of more than 1,000 schools for authorities and parents.

The report to the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China emphasized the promotion of rural vitalization and the construction of a strong agricultural country. It also mentioned enhancing support for agricultural technology and equipment.

Jiang Hao, a global partner of consultancy Roland Berger, said digitalization plays an important part in improving agricultural production and management efficiency. It helps better predict the market, balance supply and demand, and ensure the stability of production despite the influence of nature.

"Agriculture has become a high-tech industry. Digital tools decrease cost and improve production and quality, so that farmers can have higher incomes and customers enjoy safer food," he said.

Nie Fengying, a researcher at the Agricultural Information Institute of the Chinese Academy of Agricultural Sciences, said digital tools play an important role in rural industrial development and business model reform.

"Introducing digital technology to the whole process of agriculture helps promote supply-side structural reform and change production-oriented methods to quality-oriented ones," Nie said.

She added that digitalization makes agriculture greener and low-carbon, helping build an ecologically friendly rural environment. Additionally, making decisions and innovations based on data can improve rural governance effectiveness.

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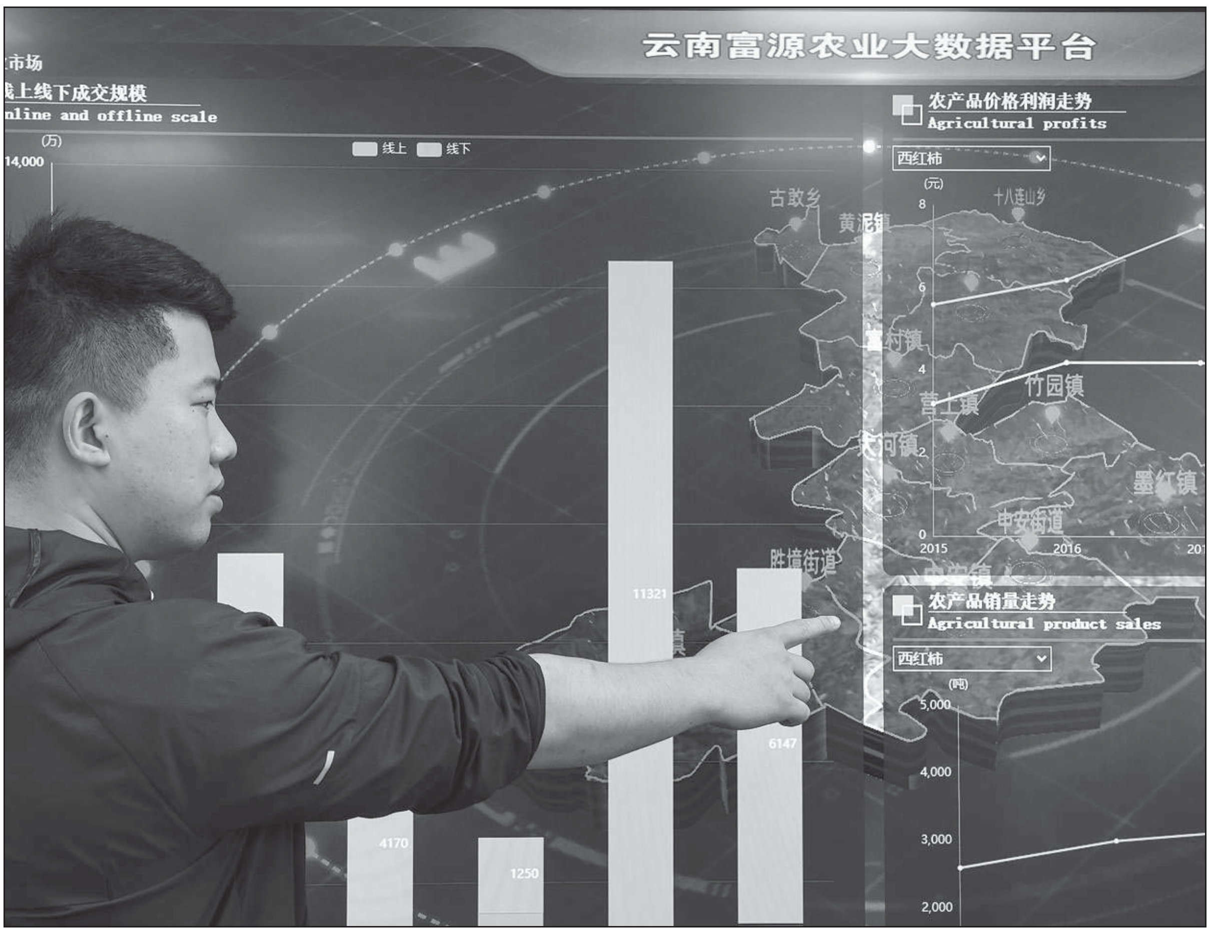


Above: An employee explains the features of an agricultural big data platform at Guizhou University in Guiyang, Guizhou province, on May 27, 2022. OU DONGQU / XINHUA

Below: Visitors watch and take photos of smart agricultural models constructed by teachers and students from Guiyang No 18 Middle School in Guiyang on May 27, 2021. QU HONGLUN / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

City accelerates smart transportation, making drivers happy

By **YANG JUN** in Guiyang and **CHEN MEILING** in Beijing

Drivers are feeling more cheerful on the roads of Guiyang, Guizhou province, as the city offers conveniences through its clever transportation application of big data and other high technologies.

While driving on some roads during off-peak hours, traffic lights can be adjusted based on real-time traffic flow through radar and video-sensing equipment, to reduce delays and improve travel efficiency, according to the city's public security transportation management bureau.

Similar conveniences can also be felt when drivers park their cars in the city. At some smart parking lots, a driver only needs to park the vehicle at an induction line so the system can automatically put it into a specific area. When the driver wants to fetch the car, he or she makes a request on the intelligent terminal device and the car will be moved out of the parking spot automatically. The entire process takes about one minute.

"Compared with traditional parking lots, it (the smart lot) reduces the time drivers take to search for an available spot and avoids waiting in long lines during peak hours or possible collisions with other vehicles," said Ai Ying, deputy general manager of the Wisdom of Guizhou Industrial Investment Co Ltd.

She added that parking lots use multiple advanced technologies, such as indoor navigation and vehicle license plate recognition, to realize unmanned management. A 24-hour video surveillance system ensures vehicles' safety.

"The resources of parking lots are not balanced in the city. There is not sufficient supply around some hospitals, schools, trade markets or communities in old towns. Drivers may not know the conditions before they arrive there," Ai said, adding that the company has built eight smart parking lots to make full use of space.

One of the parking lots used to accommodate about 200 cars. After renovating it into a vertical, intelligent one, it can hold 662 cars with six floors above ground and three floors underground.

Through its mini-program, drivers can check the locations of the parking lots and how many parking spots are left in advance, as well as see entertainment information nearby.

For those who don't drive, the city's newly opened mini-program collects information about buses, subways, taxis and rented electric scooters in real-time, which has served residents more than 80,000 times from January to May.

They can also choose to pay by scanning their faces on some subway lines, and in buses.

"Intelligent transportation aims to use modern information technology, such as big data and artificial intelligence, to combine transport with new infrastructure, to offer flexible, green and personalized services for residents," said Su Junjie, who is in charge of the urban traffic department of the Guiyang Transportation Committee.

"It expects to greatly improve experiences, reduce travel costs and increase the commuting efficiency of the city," he said.

As an important part of constructing a smart city, Guiyang has pushed to build an intelligent traffic network. To deal with traffic jams, the public security transportation management department set up a traffic situation research and evaluation center last year. Through a smart screen, traffic can be monitored in real-time across the city and if anything abnormal happens, the platform can judge whether it is a traffic accident, routine traffic jam or other events, so it can allocate policemen or adjust traffic lights to deal with the problem, a policeman named Fu Yuxin from the bureau told local media.

The platform can even predict possible traffic jams by analyzing the law of congestion occurrences and trends. Thanks to the platform, a decrease in the traffic congestion index during peak commuting time reached about 17 percent in 2022, data from the bureau showed.

According to a five-year plan (2023-27) on building a strong transportation network, released by the Ministry of Transport and four other departments earlier this year, transportation's strategic scientific and technological strength and basic technological capabilities should be enhanced to accelerate the development of intelligent transportation.

Hu Zhongxiong, Party secretary of Guiyang, said at a work conference in mid-May that intelligent transportation is an important manifestation of digital city governance and all departments should accelerate to merge information technology, such as big data, into traffic management to increase a sense of achievement, happiness and safety of the people.

A smart, vertical parking lot in Guiyang, Guizhou province helps drivers park their vehicles automatically, saving space and improving efficiency. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

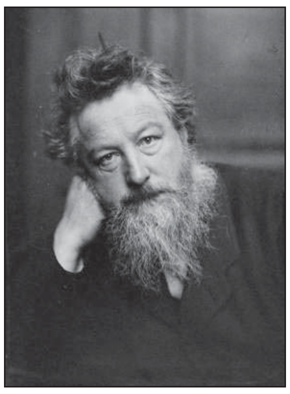
> "Compared with traditional parking lots, it (the smart lot) reduces the time drivers take to search for an available spot and avoids waiting in long lines during peak hours or possible collisions with other vehicles."
>
> **Ai Ying,** deputy general manager of the Wisdom of Guizhou Industrial Investment Co Ltd

LIFE

A visitor at the exhibition, *Beyond William Morris — British Arts and Crafts 1890-1920*, in Nanjing Museum, East China's Jiangsu province.

Exhibition highlights early design innovation

Spotlight falls on man who inspired Britain's Arts and Crafts movement at the turn of the 20th century, **Wang Linyan** reports in London.



Left: William Morris. **Center:** The *Strawberry Thief* textile pattern, designed by Morris and made around 1883, on indigo-discharged and block-printed cotton. **Right:** A sample of wallpaper featuring the *Acanthus* pattern, designed by Morris and made around 1875, block-printed in distempered colors on paper. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Left: A chair, designed by Charles Rennie Mackintosh, probably made by Francis Smith around 1907, using oak, faux leather and iron. **Above:** A silver and enamel jam dish, set with a cabochon, designed by C.R. Ashbee around 1900. **Right:** An oak, varnished table, designed by C.F.A. Voysey, made by Frederick C. Nielsen around 1905.

Curator Max Donnelly is glad that, after working for two and a half years, an exhibition introducing the British Arts and Crafts movement has opened in Nanjing, East China's Jiangsu province, this month.

Nanjing Museum is the first venue for *Beyond William Morris — British Arts and Crafts 1890-1920*. Its China tour, which will also include Hebei Museum, Chengdu Museum and two more venues, will run until 2025.

"I'm particularly excited to see the exhibition is opening in Nanjing, because I understand that it is one of the largest museums in China, and one of the oldest, celebrating 90 years this year," says Donnelly, curator of furniture and woodwork 1800-1915 at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London.

The exhibition explores the movement in Britain, which was inspired by renowned decorative art designer William Morris (1834-96), showcasing signature works by the most talented designers, craftspeople and manufacturers involved in the movement from 1890 to 1920.

The 100-plus exhibits, some of which are rarely seen in public, are carefully selected from the collections of the V&A Museum.

Visitors are able to see designs, wallpapers, textiles, furniture, ceramics, metalwork, jewelry and stained glass created by Morris and his daughter May, an embroidery designer and jeweler; English architects and designers C.F.A. Voysey and C.R. Ashbee; artist and book illustrator Walter Crane and Scottish architect and designer Charles Rennie Mackintosh, among others.

"It's the first time for the classic work of William Morris and his followers to be exhibited in China. I'm sure it will be an artistic feast for the eyes of Chinese visitors," says Tan Ping, director of Art Exhibitions China.

As President Xi Jinping, who is also general secretary of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, proposed the Global Civilization Initiative in March, Tan says, he stressed joint efforts to respect the diversity of world civilization, uphold common values of humanity, value cultural inheritance and creativity, and enhance international cultural exchanges and cooperation. The initiative is China's solution to promote the development of civilization and build a community with a shared future for mankind, he says.

"The exhibition is a key move for the Art Exhibitions China to implement the Global Civilization Initiative. It will play a key role in deepening cultural exchanges between China and the United Kingdom in the new era."

Beyond William Morris is the second V&A exhibition that Art Exhibitions China has introduced into China. The first was the exhibition of *Masterpieces in Miniature (Treasures from the Rosalinde and Arthur Gilbert Collection)*, which was seen by nearly 1 million visitors across seven Chinese cities.

Nick Marchand, head of International Programmes at V&A, takes *Beyond William Morris* as a good example of the institution's history.

"We are excited about it connecting with new audiences in China, as well as the opportunity to visit cities and provinces we've not had the chance to take exhibitions to in the past," he says. "Nanjing Museum is a national-level museum in a city with a vibrant and lively student population. We're delighted to open the exhibition in Nanjing."

For Chen Li, a curator at the Nanjing Museum, the main challenges during the planning and design of the exhibition concern exhibit protection and lighting.

Many of the exhibits are designs and textiles, which are sensitive to light and can only be exposed to light level below 50 lux.

"To best protect the exhibits, a label with light box is especially designed to provide required light level for the exhibits as well as for visitors to be able to read," Chen says.

"During the setup, a Chinese lighting designer worked together with a representative from the V&A. As it's well-designed, everything went well."

Key work

Morris was among those who, along with John Ruskin, a famous English art critic during the Victorian era, helped formulate the ideas behind the movement, which revolved around the idea of the pleasure of making things, despite the Victorian era's focus on industrial progress.

But Morris was different, because he not only preached the message, he practiced it.

"Morris combined theory with practice," says Donnelly.

Morris founded his own company in 1861, which later became known as Morris & Co. It was important, because he employed both artists and makers to design and make things, including wallpaper, furniture, stained glass, textiles, interior and exterior decor and printing limited-edition books.

"It is a practical example of his encouragement of designers and craftspeople, which makes him a leading advocate," says Donnelly.

In the wake of Morris & Co's establishment, many firms offering similar services were established, and some existing firms opened workshops specializing in handmade products. This was in addition to the scores of workshops, guilds and other enterprises which operated on Arts and Crafts principles.

The proportion of Morris' work in the exhibition is modest, about 15 pieces out of roughly 125, but Donnelly says they are all significant works by Morris or by Morris & Co.

For example, there's an original Morris watercolor design for his *Acanthus* wallpaper, which is shown alongside the final printed product. *Acanthus* design and the *Strawberry Thief* textile pattern, which shows birds stealing strawberries, are among exhibits that demonstrate Morris' strength in using plants, flowers, birds and animals as inspiration.

Reviving craftsmanship is, arguably, the biggest contribution Morris made to the movement.

The printing block used to print the *Strawberry Thief* is exhibited next to a piece of the finished fabric to show the strong link between design, craft and production.

Another exhibit is the model carpet loom, which was used by Morris to teach people how to weave carpets.

"Morris presented it to the V&A himself. It's a really important object, as it helps people understand the production process and how he was directly involved in it," explains Donnelly. "He was very hands-on in teaching; he hoped to inspire people to make things."

Personal experience

Morris' personal experience shaped his views of machines, craftsmanship and aesthetics.

Born into a well-to-do family, Morris was able to spend a lot of his childhood learning and he loved nature. When he went to Oxford to study, he developed a great interest in the literature and romance of the past.

In 1851, when he was 17, the Great Exhibition opened in London. He refused to go to the exhibition citing grounds of taste.

He had a house built for himself and his wife Jane, an embroiderer, when they got married. When they were furnishing the house, they just couldn't find things that they liked. This was one of the reasons why he decided to try and create things himself, founding his own company that would produce decorations and make things as he wanted them to be made.

And that's where his journey started.

The birth of the Arts and Crafts movement signaled the beginning of a change in the value society placed on how things were made, according to an introduction on the V&A Museum website.

"The main characteristics of the movement are the focus on good design and skilled craftsmanship, whether that was one of handmade objects, of which there are many in the exhibition, or those made with the help of some kind of form of mechanization," explains Donnelly.

A good example of the movement is the buckle and belt tag by Henry Wilson (1864-1934), a beautiful piece of silver set with semiprecious stones, which has been taken especially out of the Jewellery Gallery of the V&A Museum for the China tour.

Wilson wanted to use polished stones, not cut stones, as was the fashion at the time, as the former are a bit smoother and "maintained more of the magical quality".

Donnelly says that Wilson is a good example of an Arts and Crafts designer, as he worked in different fields as an architect, sculptor, metalworker and jeweler, and he also taught people in his studio.

There's a design for a dish by English potter and tile designer William de Morgan (1839-1917) called *Sea Birds' Island*, which shows birds perched on a raft with a whale in the water. The paper has got little holes in it. That was part of the technique of transferring the design onto the ceramic before it was decorated. It's a good example because it shows a combination of design and craft, Donnelly continues.

In addition to commissioning designs, the manufacturers have also played a key part in creating arts and crafts, and adapting designs in the movement, which is not just about handmade objects, he adds.

Influence on China

While Donnelly mentions that Asian ceramics were also a source of inspiration for the artists at the time, Chen says that, when Morris' "contagious" ideas and work entered China through Japan in the early 20th century, Morris became one of the most well-known British cultural figures during that time.

"Chen Zhifo, a modern art educator, painter and designer, was so deeply inspired by Morris, as well as the Arts and Crafts movement in Britain, that he called for merging arts and crafts with industry and manufacturers to provide products that meet the needs of people's daily lives," Chen Li cites as an example.

Acclaimed Chinese artists and designers including Pan Xunqin, Lei Guiyuan and Zhang Guangyu were also inspired to design many classic works for commercial purposes, and publish relevant books, "laying the foundation for the development of modern architecture, furniture, interior design, graphic design and commercial art", says Chen Li.

The Arts and Crafts movement flourished at a time of great social and economic upheaval in Britain, when many people moved from the country into cities to find work, and their lives changed with industrialization. There's the feeling that people were living far from nature, and they were being torn from their roots; that's partly where this love of nature comes from, Donnelly says.

"So, if we think about that today, some of the things which people wanted to try and achieve during the movement are still things that we think about now," observes Donnelly.

"Some of the key elements of Arts and Crafts were fulfillment of life through meaningful work, an appreciation of beauty and a reverence for nature and the environment. Those things are just as important to craft workers, manufacturers and consumers today.

"By looking at how artists, designers and makers tackled those issues during the period when the Arts and Crafts movement flourished, it can give us some ideas and maybe some inspiration for today."

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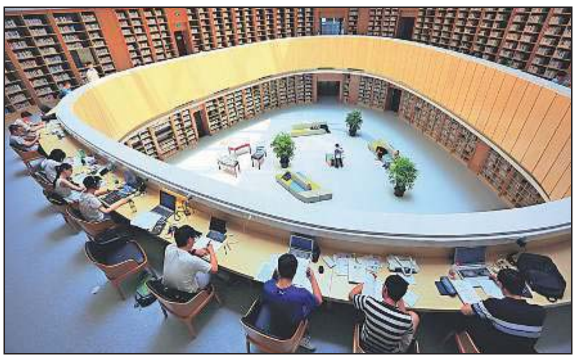
LIFESHANGHAI

Shanghai University President Liu Changsheng (middle) believes scientific research and development is an important task for the university to contribute to the economic and social development of Shanghai and the nation. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

High-tech pioneers

University president says the institution will focus on research and development and cross-disciplinary learning to enhance its contributions to the nation and the city, **Xu Xiaomin** reports.



Clockwise from top left: A street scene at the Circum-SHU Science Park. A statue of Qian Weichang (1912-2010), former president of the university. An unmanned vessel developed by the school. Students at the Qian Weichang Library.

Liu Changsheng's vision of the future isn't all that different to those seen in sci-fi movies: Humans will be augmented with the help of brain-inspired intelligence technology while new biological materials can be implanted to repair aged or injured bones, tissues and organs.

To fulfill the human race's thirst for knowledge, unmanned vessels will be dispatched to uncharted depths of the ocean in search of discoveries.

Liu, who is the president of Shanghai University and an academician of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, notes that similar scenarios have already occurred.

For example, the unmanned vessel developed by the university's Research Institute of USV (unmanned surface vessels) Engineering had played a key role in the archaeological salvage of the 150-year-old shipwreck known as the Yangtze River Estuary No 2 Ancient Vessel. The vessel was a boon to salvage efforts as the junction of the East China Sea and Yangtze River where the shipwreck was located has close-to-zero visibility due to the large amount of sand and mud running down from the upper level of the river. Such conditions make it impossible for humans to carry out salvage works.

With the help of unmanned vessels and other advanced technologies, the ancient ship, which dates back to the reign of Emperor Tongzhi (1862-75) in the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911), was successfully salvaged from beneath the water surface in November last year.

Liu says the next goal is to mass-produce the unmanned vessel, which, he notes, has been a result of the university's relentless efforts in research and development.

But fostering innovations, like the vessel, he adds, will not be easy.

"Research and development is a long process. Many enterprises have good ideas that need time and financial support. Without enough investment, some good ideas, just like seeds without water and sunshine, will die before they get to blossom," he says.

"Fortunately, our campus has the right personnel, well-equipped labs and facilities, as well as financial support from the government. This is why we decided to open our campus to enterprises with potential and work with them to incubate innovative technologies."

Key mission

The university's focus on research and development, Liu adds, stems from its determination to contribute to the economic and social development of Shanghai and the nation, as well as enhance the institution's evolution in today's digital age.

"As a university named after this famous city, our mission is undoubtedly to serve the nation's strategies and the city's key tasks," says Liu, who took over the reins of Shanghai University four years ago.

First established in 1922, the university's mission to do so is evidenced by the layout of its frontier science and technology field, which has five major sections listed: micro and nanoelectronic technology, artificial intelligence, biomedicine, new energy and quantum science and technology.

But the university is not working alone to achieve its goals. Apart from its own research, the university has also launched a plan to collaborate with the local government and start-ups to transform research into products.

One example of how the university has gone about doing this is the Circum-SHU Science Park located opposite the main campus in Baoshan district. Spanning 57 square kilometers, the park has, since early 2021, been used as a space for university staff, students and entrepreneurs to bring their innovative technology ideas to life. The park, which currently has 375 registered companies, produced 89 major achievements in the past two and a half years.

In the blueprint, the park will further expand in the future.

"As I think the growth of a university should synchronically boost the surrounding community and regional economy, it is hard to say whose success comes first as it is a mutual development and achievement," says Liu who has studied a lot about top universities' successful experience.

Suitable measures

But though his background is in biomaterials and future technologies, Liu is nevertheless paying close attention to the university's liberal art disciplines like metropolis sociology, archaeology and cultural relics protection, and Shanghai-style art.

> "As a university named after this famous city, our mission is undoubtedly to serve the nation's strategies and the city's key tasks."
>
> **Liu Changsheng,** president of Shanghai University

The reason for this is his belief that the holistic development of disciplines will be crucial to allowing the university to better aid Shanghai's evolution.

Moreover, research regarding the governance of megacities has shown that a mastery of all kinds of disciplines is important.

"We need to combine sociology with technology like big data technology to effectively manage cities. Through the research of data, we can find suitable measures to manage the society," he says.

He adds that this need to integrate science and arts, which is already reflected in the university's curriculum.

For example, courses on movie editing and ancient painting repair feature the use of AI or virtual reality technologies, according to Liu.

"Creating a war scene no longer requires the hiring of thousands of actors. In today's high-tech age, technology can create such scenes," Liu says.

Expanded in 1994, Shanghai University is ranked among the top 300 in the Academic Ranking of World Universities. The university has attracted over 30,000 students from nearly 150 countries and regions since the 1960s.

As a comprehensive college, Shanghai University currently offers a full range of academic categories; 10 disciplines are among the top 1 percent of Essential Science Indicators, an international database for emerging science trends. The university's engineering science, materials science and chemistry disciplines are among the world's top 0.1 percent.

At present, Shanghai University has mutual recognition of credits and degrees with 47 partner institutions that are ranked among the top 200 in the world.

To further expand its influence and become more globalized in the future, Shanghai University is keenly focused on luring high-end talent, fostering strategic partnerships and organizing international conferences that bring great minds together, says Liu.

The university has also been promoting cross-border exchange and cooperating with the Wharton School of Business in the United States to carry out teacher training and student leadership improvement courses. It also has cooperative courses with Northwestern University in the United States, the University of Edinburgh in the United Kingdom, and Tohoku University in Japan.

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Museum exhibition tells story of ancient books

By ZHANG KUN in Shanghai
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Ancient books from the Song (960-1279) and Yuan (1271-1368) dynasties are now on show at a new exhibition at the Shanghai Museum and about half of the exhibits are listed as "treasured ancient books" in China.

Pages Through the Ages: A Selection of the Song and Yuan Rare Books from the Shanghai Museum is set to run through Aug 13, featuring 66 precious books from the 10th to the 14th centuries. It is the first large showcase of ancient books from the collection of the museum.

There is a saying among the archaeological circles in China that goes, "A page from a book of the Song Dynasty is worth a tael of gold", which refers to the importance and high value of these ancient books.

The living past

Collected Works of Wang Anshi at the exhibition. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

The Song and Yuan dynasties saw a peak in the development of Chinese culture, and this coincided with the golden age of ancient books in China, says Chu Xiaobo, director of the Shanghai Museum.

This period also saw vast improvements made to papermaking, ink manufacturing and block printing techniques, and their rapid development led to the creation of diversified binding formats that ranged from scrolls to butterfly to concertina and wrapped-back bindings.

Books from these periods are highly renowned for their content, as well as aesthetics, which include fonts, typography and binding, notes Chen Cai, deputy director of the library at the Shanghai Museum. Among the highlights of the exhibition is *A Catalogue of Plum Blossoms*. Created by author Song Boren, the book has been hailed as an important milestone in print-making in China.

Visitors admire ancient books at *Pages Through the Ages: A Selection of the Song and Yuan Rare Books from the Shanghai Museum*. GAO ERQIANG / CHINA DAILY

The block-printed copy of the book was produced by the Hall of Shuanggui (Double Osmanthus) in the second year of the Jingding Era (1261) is believed to be the first book in China dedicated to the portrayal and documentation of plum blossoms.

The book consists of 100 pictures of plum blossoms, each accompanied by a short poem, and is a documentation of the entire life cycle of the flower. Plum trees are significant in Chinese culture as they are associated with virtues, such as purity, endurance and modesty.

According to Chu, the book was chosen for the exhibition as it exemplifies the aesthetics and lifestyle of ancient Chinese literati.

The copy of the book in the Shanghai Museum is the only surviving version of the book and was donated by Wu Hufan (1894-1968), a renowned art lover and artist. Such was his love for plum blossoms that he even named his study *Meijing shuwu*, which means library with a view of plums.

Shanghai Museum will hold a series of lectures, workshops and salons for audiences of all ages to help them better understand the exhibition and learn about the stories behind these treasured books, according to Chu.

If you go

Pages Through the Ages: A Selection of the Song and Yuan Rare Books from the Shanghai Museum
May 16-Aug 13, 9 am-5 pm, Tuesday-Sunday
201 Renmin Avenue, Huangpu district, Shanghai, 021-6372-3500

LIFE

The flow of knowledge

As an inheritor of multiple tai chi styles, Li Jianfang views it as his duty to pass on the traditions, techniques and profound culture of the martial art to future generations, **Li Yingxue** reports.

Whether it's under the moonlight, in a humble shelter, on lofty plateaus, or by the seashore, Li Jianfang has persistently practiced tai chi for decades with unwavering commitment.

He often reflects, "I may not remember a specific day when I practiced tai chi over these many years, but I certainly remember the days when I didn't."

Li, 66, a retired official, is the third-generation inheritor of Wang Qihe-style tai chi — a national intangible cultural heritage. He has been dedicated to practicing and spreading the martial art for over five decades. As well as teaching his students, he has been invited to various institutions and universities to give tai chi lectures and presentations.

"It is essential to preserve and pass down the correct traditional techniques, and it is crucial to identify and cultivate young enthusiasts of tai chi, nurturing their passion," Li says.

Wang Qihe (1889-1936), from Xingtai, Hebei province, dedicated himself to practicing multiple styles of martial arts, acquiring a wealth of skills and knowledge, later forming his own style of tai chi.

Wang Qihe-style tai chi includes two simplified routines with 13 and 24 forms respectively, two traditional routines with 84 and 108 forms and a dynamic, 38-form, fast-paced routine, as well as dedicated routines for saber, spear and sword.

For three generations of Wang Qihe-style tai chi inheritors, the transmission of knowledge and techniques has been conducted through one-on-one, hands-on instruction.

"This deliberate approach may have resulted in a slower dissemination, but it has effectively preserved the authenticity of the traditional methods in their purest form," Li says.

After decades of practice, Li thinks Wang Qihe-style tai chi is characterized by an authentic lineage, a systematic boxing theory, a moderate movement range and exquisite pugilistic techniques.

Li explains that in this style of tai chi boxing, the upper body is gracefully extended, exhibiting a harmonious balance between relaxation and tension, the techniques are precise and the lower body supplies great strength, maintaining stability while remaining agile.

"It encompasses various functions such as fitness, self-defense and personal cultivation," he says.

"In terms of technique, it emphasizes many subtle and refined aspects, including body posture, footwork, hand position, leg work, sharp vision, tactical strategies and, of course, spiritual cultivation. Every aspect is intricately interwoven with the precise and detailed principles of martial arts," Li adds.

Li was born in Ren county (now Renze district), in Xingtai, where Wang Qihe-style tai chi originated. He recalls that, in his hometown, many people practiced martial arts and they performed their skills on the street during festivals.

Liu Renhai, who was the senior disciple of Wang, was a popular figure at that time. At the age of 13, Li started to learn tai chi from Liu.

"At that time, I was just fascinated by the skills displayed by tai chi practitioners. Moreover, I had the opportunity to receive personal guidance from Liu Renhai himself. So, I dedicated myself wholeheartedly to learning the art, and became deeply engrossed in its practice. Since then, I have never stopped my training," Li says.

For over a decade, Li studied tai chi from Liu, who taught martial arts with unwavering patience and attention to detail. Whenever Li went to train, Liu showed no sign of impatience and Liu's wife would prepare meals for them.

Li recalls that just days before he passed away, at the age of 79, Liu could still push Li several meters effortlessly when teaching him tai chi.

"These experiences, day by day, subtly and gradually shaped me. Learning from him wasn't just about martial arts; it was about learning to be a better person," Li says.

Li has also learned from Wang Rongtang, Yao Jizu and Fu Zhongwen, all martial art masters.

As he improved his own tai chi skills, he gradually acquired his own students. His classes are made up of people from all walks of life, from grassroots workers to university professors, government officials, entrepreneurs and professional martial arts coaches. Regardless of profession, he holds them all in the same regard.

He primarily selects students based on two criteria: good character and genuine passion. "Finding a good teacher is challenging for students, but for a teacher, finding good students is even more difficult — it depends on fate," Li says.

Yang Wenyuan, 55, began practicing tai chi in 2010 with the aim of enhancing his overall well-being and physical fitness, in order to mitigate a demanding work schedule that was adversely affecting his health.

He started to learn Wang Qihe-style tai chi from Li in 2017 and, ever since, each year he will spend some time with Li to further his learning. He has also taken on his own students.

According to Yang, Li's proteges are spread across the country, but with the establishment of a WeChat group, communication has become more convenient.

"We share our training videos with the master, and he provides us with dedicated and detailed feedback. Other students also benefit from the master's insightful comments, and the entire group encourages each other, creating a positive and conducive learning environment," he says.

Li notes that tai chi is an aerobic exercise, known for its relaxed, stable, slow and even movements. The guiding principle is to shape the body with the mind, seeking a harmonious balance between the internal and the external.

He says that the benefits of tai chi include strengthening muscles and bones, cultivating internal strength, maintaining the health of internal organs, encouraging blood flow, regulating and nurturing energy flow, and cultivating wisdom.

Once, Li visited the shores of Nam Co Lake in the Tibet autonomous region, located at an altitude of 5,000 meters. He began to experience symptoms of altitude sickness due to oxygen deprivation. However, by practicing tai chi there, he says he was able to alleviate the symptoms and overcome it.

"This remarkable experience further reinforced my unwavering belief in the miraculous effects of tai chi, which involves directing energy flow with the mind and harmonizing the body's meridians," he says.

In addition to tai chi, Li has other hobbies such as calligraphy and poetry, and he believes that all forms of culture are interconnected.

"While different cultures may have unique expressions, they share a common foundation in conveying the universality of human nature. This allows for the blending and integration of diverse disciplines," Li says.

He thinks tai chi is a profound and encompassing art, representing a broad spectrum of traditional cultural nourishment. "Incorporating the influence of tai chi culture can be highly beneficial, regardless of one's profession or artistic pursuits. Conversely, the practice of tai chi requires the enrichment of various cultural influences," he says.

For many years, Li has been passionate about calligraphy. He thinks that, similar to tai chi, calligraphy follows the principles of balance, harmony and coordinated movement.

Li has also composed 46 poems in the form of ancient-style seven-character verse, encapsulating the movements of the traditional routines in Wang Qihe-style tai chi. His concise and refined poetry format has attracted the interest of learners, researchers and poetry enthusiasts to the art of tai chi.

During his decadeslong career as a government official, he used his spare time to practice tai chi at home and in the workplace. It was only after his retirement in 2020 that he wholeheartedly devoted himself to the widespread dissemination of tai chi.

He was not alone. Li and his wife, Tan Xingmin, were neighbors in the same village, and they had both been practicing Wang Qihe-style tai chi since a young age. In recent years, this devoted couple has been actively engaged in promoting the martial art and striving to enhance its popularity. Tan is now the president of Hebei's Wang Qihe-style tai chi association.

Wang Qihe-style tai chi was inscribed on the national intangible cultural heritage list in November 2014.

In 2020, the art of tai chi was officially inscribed onto UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. As an inheritor of three different tai chi styles — Yang-style, Wu-style and Wang Qihe-style — Li, along with his wife, actively participated in the application process and played a crucial role in organizing and preparing the necessary documentation, including written materials, images, and video recordings.

He thinks the development of tai chi is a holistic undertaking that requires support from the government, guidance from public opinion, research from academia, standardization within the industry, self-discipline among different schools of martial arts, and the commitment of its successors, all working in synergy.

"As inheritors of tai chi, we must shoulder our responsibilities, elevate our capabilities, and play our part effectively," he says.

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> "It is essential to preserve and pass down the correct traditional techniques, and it is crucial to identify and cultivate young enthusiasts of tai chi, nurturing their passion."
>
> **Li Jianfang,** third-generation inheritor of Wang Qihe-style tai chi

Above: Li Jianfang hosts a tai chi class during the 2020 Intangible Cultural Heritage Protection Training in Renze district, Xingtai, Hebei province. **Left:** Li provides a student with one-on-one instruction in Beijing in February 2019.
PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Li Jianfang, an inheritor of three different styles of tai chi, has been practicing the martial art for more than five decades.
PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

SPORTS

SOCCER

Martinez masterclass sounds warning to City

Argentine inspires Inter to Coppa glory ahead of Champions League final

Inter Milan coach Simone Inzaghi poses with the Coppa Italia on Wednesday. REUTERS

Inter Milan's Lautaro Martinez soaks up the adulation after scoring his first goal in Wednesday's 2-1 Coppa Italia win over Fiorentina. REUTERS

Inter Milan's Romelu Lukaku celebrates with the trophy in Rome on Wednesday. REUTERS

ROME — Take note, Manchester City: the bigger the match, the bigger the performance from Lautaro Martinez lately.

After scoring key goals against Benfica and city rival AC Milan to help secure Inter Milan a spot in the Champions League final, Martinez netted twice as the Nerazzurri produced a 2-1 comeback win over Fiorentina to retain the Coppa Italia on Wednesday.

It's the second trophy that Inter has won this season after beating Milan in the Italian Super Cup in January — when Martinez also scored. After a couple of matches to conclude Serie A, Martinez and Inter will be aiming for one more trophy when they face City in the Champions League final on June 10 in Istanbul.

"In all honesty, I am moved, because for a couple of years we have been bringing trophies to this great club and we've got to continue this way," said Martinez, who also played a big role when Inter won Serie A in 2021. "I want to keep contributing for Inter, because that's what matters."

Martinez now has a career-best 27 goals across all competitions for Inter this season, having also helped Argentina win the World Cup in December. He's the only player to have appeared in all 54 of Inter's matches this season.

The match at the Stadio Olimpico in Rome was lively from the start as Nicolas Gonzalez put Fiorentina ahead after just three minutes following a lapse by Inter's defense. A cross from Jonathan Ikone was allowed to float across the area for Gonzalez to knock in at the far post.

Then Martinez took over to put Inter ahead before the break.

First, a perfectly placed through-ball from Marcelo Brozovic set up the equalizer as Martinez ran onto the pass and scored with an angled shot into the far corner for his 100th goal with Inter. Then Martinez produced an acrobatic volley to redirect in a pass from Nicolo Barella.

Martinez nearly produced another goal when he set up Edin Dzeko with only the goalkeeper to beat. However, Dzeko's shot sailed high over the bar.

It is the ninth Italian Cup title for Inter, while Nerazzurri coach Simone Inzaghi has now won seven of his eight finals as a manager.

"We started poorly and had the wrong approach, which is rare for us, but the guys did well to stay in the game anyhow and then turn it around," Inzaghi said. "The team is improving match by match."

Learn from loss

Fiorentina will play West Ham in the Europa Conference League final on June 7.

"We were hoping for a different result but this will serve as experience and preparation for what to expect on a mental level and how to handle the match for the Conference League final," Fiorentina coach Vincenzo Italiano said.

"It's disappointing, but we have another final to prepare for and two Serie A games, so we cannot let go now; we must remain concentrated," Italiano added. "We will try to avoid making the same mistakes that we saw tonight because that too will be a one-off match against a quality team, but if we play with the same spirit seen tonight, I think we can again cause problems for our opponent."

Fiorentina became the first club to reach the finals of four different UEFA competitions with its victory over Basel last week in the Conference League semifinals. The Florence-based side made its first European final in 33 years.

Italiano remains confident that his team's Coppa Italia final defeat will not have a negative impact on his players' morale.

"We are accustomed to ... getting right back on track," he said. "I tell the players that when you fight with heart and sweat for the shirt, you never really lose."

By reaching the final, Inter and Fiorentina had each already qualified for next season's expanded Italian Super Cup, which will feature four teams, also including Serie A champion Napoli and the league runner-up (currently Lazio).

AGENCIES

Pep toasts champion's intensity after boozy buildup

BRIGHTON, England — Manchester City manager Pep Guardiola praised the intensity of his Premier League champion after a 1-1 draw at Brighton and Hove Albion on Wednesday despite admitting to some booze-fueled celebrations a little over 48 hours before.

For the first time since February, City dropped league points as a stunning goal by Brighton's Paraguayan teenager Julio Enciso snapped its 12-game winning run in the league.

Erling Haaland, who set up Phil Foden's opener, had a late goal disallowed, resulting in a yellow card for Guardiola who simply hates dropping points.

City has one more league game left before an FA Cup final against Manchester United and then a Champions League final against Inter Milan.

Victories in both will see City match Manchester United's 1998-99 treble, so Guardiola's players might have been excused for taking their foot off the gas, having won a fifth title in six seasons last weekend. That they did not win, however, was more to do with an excellent Brighton side who sealed a Europa League spot.

"Exceptional game. Congratulations to Brighton for their deserved qualification to the Europa League," Guardiola told Sky Sports. "The game we played, 48 hours after we drank all the alcohol in Manchester, 48 hours later we behaved and we showed why we were the champions against that team.

"We showed what we have done with and without the ball. I didn't see one drop in our intensity and idea. They had chances, we had chances, we scored a goal, they scored a goal.

"Both teams want the ball, both teams want to press. The keepers are fundamental in this game. The quality (Brighton) have, they are an exceptional team."

Manchester City's Erling Haaland unleashes an acrobatic strike during Wednesday's Premier League match at Brighton. REUTERS

Guardiola shared some jokes during the game with Brighton boss Roberto De Zerbi and warmly congratulated the home players.

But he was angry that Haaland's goal was disallowed for shirt-pulling. "Watch it. Watch it, if it's a fault, every action for Erling is a fault," he said of his 52-goal striker.

Guardiola said his side cannot afford to lose any momentum as it seeks to make history.

"I didn't see it, against Chelsea I didn't see it today. During the week we have to rest, recover mentally," he said.

"It's been demanding for the past six months playing Bayern Munich, Real Madrid, chasing Arsenal. The training now is just relaxed."

Brighton's point means it can make plans for the Europa League, the club's first European venture.

"What an achievement, what a club, what a group of guys. The togetherness, the culture and we are driven by a top, top manager. Special times," keeper Jason Steele said.

It marks an outstanding first season in charge at Albion for manager De Zerbi, who only took over from Graham Potter in September after Potter left for an ill-fated spell with Chelsea. "It's a fantastic goal, we achieved an incredible target," De Zerbi said.

"Man City is the best team in the world. For us it was a very tough game. We deserve the point. We deserve the Europa League."

The club faced an uncertain future at the time of Potter's exit but has gone on to flourish under Italian De Zerbi, who also led the team to the FA Cup semifinals.

Sixth place beats Brighton's previous highest finish of ninth, which it achieved under Potter last year.

"You never know in the early part of the season what may happen when you hire a new coach," Brighton chairman Tony Bloom said. "Fortunately we hired the perfect man. The players have taken to him so magnificently. His motivational skills, tactical skills and getting the best out of our players has been absolutely superb."

AGENCIES

ESPORTS

WADA working with gaming chiefs to zap doping threat

Gamers who use stimulants could be frozen out of competitions after the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) and Global Esport Federation (GEF) said they will work on an education program that could lead to signing onto the WADA Code and open the door to the Olympics.

WADA told Reuters it had been approached by the GEF about developing a plan around health and wellness which could alert gamers, who spend hours and even days behind screens, to the dangers of performance-enhancing drugs.

Despite the fact that gaming is a billion-dollar industry and esports tournaments offer hundreds of thousands of dollars in prize money, it has no regulatory body for drug testing.

"Esport Federation realizes that they have now a real need to start educating their players because they see there are challenges in the abuse of substances," WADA director general Olivier Niggli told Reuters. "They play for 16 to 18 hours a day, they have a bad lifestyle that is not very healthy.

"They have a health concern first. Doping is one of them.

"Clearly the way they are playing requires some support if you are playing a game 18 hours in a row behind a screen."

Melita Moore, a GEF board member and editor of *The Handbook of Esports Medicine*, told Reuters it was well-known that there were performance-enhancing substances being used in esports.

But before there can be drug-testing WADA must meet the esports community and start to provide education and awareness around health and performance.

"There is not a regulatory body in esports. Therefore, the word doping does not exist in the same context as it does in traditional sports," said Moore, who has served as a team physician in the NBA 2K League, WNBA and NBA G League.

"Which means there isn't anti-doping measures that are or can be put in place.

"I do believe that in the future, there will be a regulatory body and doping will become part of the nomenclature used in esports."

Olympic interest

The rapidly growing world of esports and its popularity among young people has caught the attention of the International Olympic Committee (IOC), which in 2017 recognized it as a sports activity.

"Whether they could one day be considered for the Olympic program, the answer is yes," IOC president Thomas Bach told a news conference in 2020. "It depends when this day is coming."

That day would appear to be close at hand.

Esports made its major multi-sport event debut as a demonstration sport at the 2018 Asian Games in Jakarta and will be a medal event at this year's Asian Games, which will take place in Hangzhou from Sept 23-Oct 8.

Also this October, the first Pan American Esports Championships will run in parallel with the Pan Am Games in Santiago, Chile.

But if esports wants to become part of the Olympic program it would, like every other sport, have to be compliant with the WADA Code, which means athletes are subject to testing, including out-of-competition.

"You have athletes for esports coming completely outside any anti-doping regimen but they are there and with other athletes who are subjected to strict rules and the Code," said Niggli.

"We really want to encourage now the esports to be a bit more structured and regulated in terms of the potential use of prohibited substances.

"We think it is important that they start moving in that direction."

A revision of the WADA Code begins later this year and Niggli said there may be a need to consider incorporating new rules that reflect on esports.

While Moore agrees that WADA is "on track with their approach", testing is something down the road and the focus must be on education and awareness.

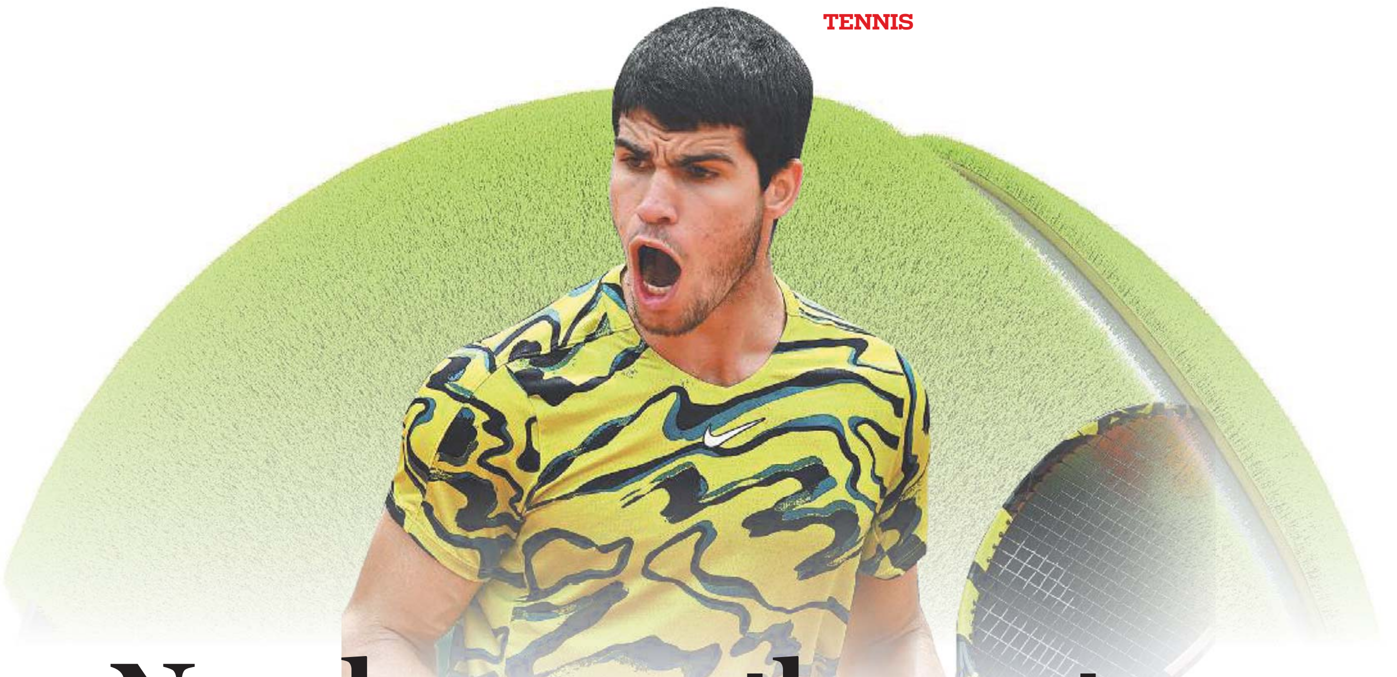
"I believe this is where we start the conversations," said Moore. "Although esports is not in its infancy, as it started in the early 1970s, it is most definitely in an evolutionary phase with over 3 billion gamers worldwide.

"Until recently, there has not been a pipeline in esports where gamers have grown up with the basic knowledge surrounding education on their health and performance, unlike their traditional sports counterparts."

REUTERS

SPORTS

TENNIS



Novak versus the next-gen

Young guns bid to dash Djokovic's French Open dream in Nadal's absence

There's a reason a statue of Rafael Nadal stands outside Court Philippe Chatrier on the southwest outskirts of Paris.

No player ever lorded over any Grand Slam tournament the way Nadal has ruled the French Open, winning it year after year after year for a read-it-again-to-make-sure total of 14 times. It is impossible to overstate what a monumental development it is that Nadal's name will be absent from the bracket when play begins Sunday.

The last time they held the clay-court major without him? Back in 2004 — back before women and men received equal prize money there, before the main stadium was reconstructed with a retractable roof, before night sessions were added to the schedule.

"Him and Roland Garros is something special," said Coco Gauff, the 19-year-old American who was the runner-up to Iga Swiatek for the 2022 women's title in Paris. "I remember last year ... I made the mistake of doubting him. Next thing you know, he pretty much stormed his way to the final and won in straight sets."

Then, using the now-familiar acronym for "Greatest of All-Time," Gauff continued: "He's just a 'GOAT' in that way. A 'GOAT' on clay. Someone you can't underestimate."

Every man in the field — well, every realistic and honest man — knew there was one player to avoid in the draw. And they all knew it was almost certain that Nadal would leave France with yet another Coupe des Mousquetaires. His career record at Roland Garros: 112-3.

"He's obviously always going to be the favorite," said Casper Ruud, the Norwegian who was runner-up to Nadal last year, "if he plays."

He won't play this time: Nadal, who turns 37 on June 3, ruled himself out last week with the hip-flexor injury that has sidelined him since January. His aim is to return to Paris in 2024 for what probably would be his last French Open.

"Roland Garros will always be Roland Garros, with or without me," Nadal said, "without a doubt."

Perhaps. Really, though, no tennis event and athlete are linked quite the way this event and this athlete are.

So the question becomes: Who takes advantage of his absence?

Will it be the wunderkind considered an heir apparent, Carlos Alcaraz, who won the US Open in September at age 19, finished last season ranked No 1 and just returned to that spot? What about Novak Djokovic, who owns two victories against Nadal at the French Open and two titles of his own at the place? Or Daniil Medvedev, coming off his first clay title? Or Holger Rune, who's beaten Djokovic twice in a row?

"I see it maybe more open this year than the other years," Rune said. "It's interesting. It makes it more fun."

The stakes for Djokovic are obvious: A championship would be his 23rd at a Slam, breaking a tie with Nadal for the men's record. As it is, the 36-year-old from Serbia has won 10 of the past 19 major trophies.

Nadal collected a half-dozen in that span, while three men claimed one apiece, all at the US Open: Alcaraz, Medvedev and Dominic Thiem.

For quite a while, fans have been wondering when the Big Three would give way to the next group. Roger Federer retired last year. Nadal appears close to joining him. Djokovic is still thriving, although he has been dealing with discomfort in his surgically repaired right elbow lately.

"A new generation is here already. I mean, Alcaraz is No 1 in the world. ... Obviously, he's playing amazing tennis. I think it's also good for our sport that we have new faces, new guys coming up. It's normal. We've been saying this for years — that we can expect it to come, that moment to come, when you have kind of a shift of generations," Djokovic said.

"I'm personally still trying to hang in there with all of them. I'm happy with — of course, very happy with — my career so far," he said. "I still have the hunger to keep going."

That sort of desire exists for Nadal, too. He just could not will his hip to heal quickly enough.

It will be odd to hold a French Open without him. Odd for the tournament itself, for other players, for spectators.

And odd for him.

"With everything that the tournament means to me, you can imagine how difficult this is for me," Nadal said. "It is not a decision I make; it is a decision that my body has made."

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

> "A new generation is here already. I mean, Alcaraz is No 1 in the world. ... Obviously, he's playing amazing tennis. I think it's also good for our sport that we have new faces, new guys coming up..."
>
> **Novak Djokovic**

Novak Djokovic (above), the man responsible for two of Rafael Nadal's three losses in 115 French Open matches, would usually be a heavy title favorite in Nadal's absence, but world No 1 and top seed Carlos Alcaraz (top) and second seed Daniil Medvedev (left), pose major challenges to Djokovic. AGENCIES

Swiatek still the fave despite injury scare

Iga Swiatek can become the first back-to-back women's champion at the French Open in 16 years if she can shake off a worrying injury.

Elsewhere, rivals battle inconsistent form and bruised confidence ahead of the season's second Grand Slam tournament which gets underway in Paris on Sunday.

AFP looks at three talking points in the women's singles:

Back-to-back bid

World No 1 Swiatek is already a three-time major winner after capturing the 2020 and 2022 French Opens as well as the 2022 US Open.

Now the 21-year-old Pole attempts to become the first back-to-back women's champion at Roland Garros since Justine Henin won three on the bounce from 2005-2007.

It is a challenge which has defied some of the greats.

Maria Sharapova was champion in 2012 but then ended runner-up 12 months later.

Serena Williams swept to the title in 2015 before falling short in the 2016 final.

Since Henin's triple, Francesca Schiavone also joined the near-miss club as her 2010 championship was followed by a runner-up spot the following year.

Before Henin, defending the women's title appeared a lot more straightforward — Steffi Graf achieved it in 1987 and 1988 and again in 1995 and 1996.

Monica Seles racked up three in a row from 1990-1992. Chris Evert went back-to-back three times — 1974-1975, 1979-1980 and 1985-1986.

Swiatek suffered a thigh injury which forced her to retire from her Italian Open quarterfinal against eventual champion Elena Rybakina in Rome last week but said she was "positive" about her chances of playing in Paris.

However, the French Open rarely reads the room. Swiatek's 2020 title defense ended a year later in the quarterfinals.

Her successor as champion, Barbora Krejcikova, lost in the first round when she returned in 2022.

Ladies' night?

As part of its deal with Amazon Prime Video, the French Open introduced night sessions for the first time in 2021.

Six of the first seven sessions that year featured men's singles, leading to former women's world No 1 Victoria Azarenka to highlight the obvious imbalance.

"It's just honestly a bit frustrating every time you're trying to deal with the organization here, it's becoming '*pas possible*' (not possible)'. Everything you hear is '*pas possible*'."

In 2022, only one of 10 night sessions featured a women's singles clash.

Tournament director Amelie Mauresmo, a former Wimbledon and Australian Open champion, then compounded the controversy by suggesting men's matches have "more attraction".

She later apologized, insisting her comments had been taken out of context.

Aryna on the rise

Despite her injury worry, Swiatek remains favorite to defend her Roland Garros title having won the Stuttgart clay tournament last month before finishing runner-up to Aryna Sabalenka on the faster, higher-altitude clay courts of Madrid.

World No 2 Sabalenka won her maiden Grand Slam title in Australia in January but on clay the big-hitting Belarusian remains a work-in-progress.

She has never got beyond the third round in Paris despite making at least the semifinals at all of the other three majors.

Furthermore, her title win in Madrid this spring was followed by a first-up exit at the hands of 134th-ranked Sofia Kenin in Rome.

Kenin, a former Australian Open champion and runner-up in Paris in 2020, lost in the opening round of qualifying for the French Open on Monday, knocked out by French world No 278 Margaux Rouvroy.

Among the remainder of the top 10, Coco Gauff was runner-up last year while Maria Sakkari, Daria Kasatkina and Petra Kvitova have all made the semifinals.

Wimbledon champion Rybakina arrives in Paris having won the Italian Open although three of her six opponents in the Rome draw retired with injury.

The Russian-born Kazakh has yet to get past the last eight at Roland Garros.

AFP